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THE SOCIAL & POLITICAL IDEAS OF SOME GREAT FRENCH THINKERS OF THE AGE OF REASON

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THE SOCIAL & POLITICAL IDEAS OF SOME GREAT FRENCH THINKERS OF THE AGE OF REASON

A SERIES OF LECTURES DELIVERED AT KING'S COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON DURING THE SESSION 1928–29

EDITED BY

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PREFACE

THE present volume—the fifth of the series on social and political ideas—is devoted to French thinkers of the so-called Age of Reason. The term "Age of Reason," like the term "Augustan Age," which was used to denote the period covered by the preceding volume, is a vague one. It is necessary for our purpose that it should be so; for movements of thought are less limited by boundaries of time and space than are movements of politics, and all that can be done in defining them is to indicate broadly the decades or centuries within which they attained their maximum of intensity. The "Age of Reason" may be roughly dated as the period which elapsed between the death of Louis XIV in 1715 and the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. This period, covered by the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI, was that in which the hitherto dominant authorities of Church and State were questioned and widely repudiated. It was the period that saw the rapid spread of scepticism and the ominous approach of social revolution. Hence the study of the thinkers, and particularly the French thinkers, of the "Age of Reason" is very largely a study of those intellectual forces that helped to inaugurate the modern democratic and unbelieving world.

The succeeding volume of this series will, it is hoped, be devoted to the thinkers of the Revolutionary Age itself—to Paine, Godwin, Bentham, Burke, and their contemporaries.

F. J. C. HEARNSHAW

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THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS OF SOME GREAT FRENCH THINKERS OF THE AGE OF REASON

I

INTRODUCTORY

THE AGE OF REASON

THE study of the eighteenth century in France must begin by the admission of its complexity. Generalisation is helpless before temperaments so various and ideas so disparate. If we make it the period of aggressive rationalism we are confronted by the dominating spectacle of Rousseau. If we find its significance in the emergence of romantic sensibility Voltaire, Holbach, and Montesquieu immediately arrest our attention. In a sense, it is the most French of all the centuries, French in its passion for logical abstraction, its taste for simplification, its determination to push principle relentlessly to its appointed end. Yet, in another sense, no epoch saw a wider influence attributable to foreign doctrine. If eighteenth-century France is the age of Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, it is the age also of Locke and Richardson, of Ossian and Young. The Romantic movement, at least, has its roots deep in English soil.

The period, moreover, is not one of an unchanging temper. The first forty years are, for the most part, rationalist in outlook. But that rationalism is not of the eighteenth century in its origins, nor is it unique in its pervasiveness. It comes from the scepticism of Bayle and Fontenelle and Saint-Évremond, and this, in its turn, is linked at once to Descartes and the classical spirit on one side, and, on the other, to Rabelais and Montaigne, with their deep-rooted Renaissance humanism. Yet even here the faint beginnings of the Romantic temper can be discerned. There is a morality of the heart in

Saint-Évremond, an emphasis upon the claims of passionate feeling in works like the *Lettres d'Héloïse et Abelard*, a defence of sentimental insight in the Abbé Dubos and in Toussaint, which presaged a wider development. Nor must we forget that both in this period and its successor there is an atmosphere in which experimental science seems to provide the mainsprings of social thought. When Diderot attended lectures on anatomy and physiology he was only doing what every great lady thought it a part of her education to do. Even Rousseau wrote a book on the principles of chemistry; and no one can read the works of Condorcet or Turgot or the Physiocrats without seeing that the influence upon them of scientific discovery was almost boundless. Another change is visible again after the publication of the *Nouvelle Héloïse* in 1762. The claims of reason seem to fade before the imperative demands of sentiment. Tenderness, intuition, sensibility, dethrone the empire of deductive rationalism. Yet even in this new phase the older system-making does not lose its prestige. If Julie enchants thousands, the average Frenchman continues, with Candide, to cultivate his garden. Abstract truth, the Voltairean common sense, with its power of destructive irony, the natural laws of Condillac and Quesnay—these still advance with pride to the conflict of ideas.

Yet one thing we can say of the period with conviction which would not be true of any earlier time. The nation discovered its own existence, and therewith its right to political power. It made the discovery because the philosophers destroyed altogether the association of social rights with aristocratic privilege. Seeking for themselves the right to follow the effort of intelligence, wherever it might lead, they found that the condemnation of the institutions of the *ancien régime*, political, religious, economic, was inherent in their effort. No one can seriously claim to-day that the philosophers caused the Revolution; that is a mythopoesis not even edifying to ourselves. But no one, either, is entitled to argue that, without them, it would have been the same Revolution. They made it conscious of its purposes. They provided it with the intellectual armoury from which its main weapons were drawn. The young Marat declaiming the *Contrat social* in the gardens of the Tuileries, the still younger Marie Phlipon insisting that

her life was different because she had read the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, were paying a conscious tribute to those who had shaped its destiny.

Let us try to put this from another angle. In the space of less than a hundred years the philosophers effected a transformation in the French mind which can, perhaps, be best explained by saying that Bossuet, Boileau, and Racine would not have understood either the methods or the aspirations of Diderot, Mably, and Rousseau. So widespread, indeed, was the empire of the new spirit that even its opponents were deeply infected by its presuppositions. If we take any characteristic apologist for Catholicism in the eighteenth century—the Abbé Gérard, for example—it is as obvious that he is the contemporary of Voltaire and Rousseau as that the groundwork of his defence would have been unintelligible to Bossuet or the "Great" Arnauld. The pervasiveness of this new spirit is remarkable. It is hardly less perceptible in the sermons of Massillon than in the *Encyclopædia* of Diderot, in the comedies of Marivaux than in the demographic studies of Sébastien Mercier.

Nowhere, indeed, is it simple or uniform. Partly it is a faith in the boundless power of reason, a faith reinforced by confidence in the prospects of scientific discovery, a trust in the power of rational inquiry to discover the structural principles of the moral universe. Thence comes, by a natural sequence, its profound optimism, its confidence in the certainty of human progress, which, as with the Abbé de Saint-Pierre and Condorcet, refuses to set limits to the perfectibility of man. Partly, also, it is a trust in intuition, a belief that the sentiment within most truly reveals the reality without, which enables us to insist not only upon the natural goodness of man, but also to make the discoveries of reason square with our own desires. In this realm the high-priest is Rousseau; and no other political thinker has even approached his power of externalising his autobiography into a programme.

II

Certain characteristics of the eighteenth century stand out in startling contrast to the qualities of its predecessor. The

seventeenth century was, despite the persistence of a libertine tradition, essentially Christian in outlook; not less certainly the eighteenth is profoundly hostile to Christian dogma of every kind. The seventeenth century was deeply nationalist, but little critical, a period of great art and an ardent love of order. The eighteenth century is cosmopolitan in outlook, and, as with Voltaire and Rousseau, nationalism in the realm of thought or institutions seemed to it a pitiful thing. It is above all things critical of tradition and rule, less interested in the form of its thought than in its substance. What explains these differences? Essentially, it is obvious, their explanation lies in the effects of Louis XIV's reign. The growing weakness of the Church was patent to every one, and it was the primary architect of its own misfortunes. Its hostility to all inquiry, its zeal for persecution, its fanatic opposition to change, made it suspect on every side. The quarrel between Jansenist and Jesuit, between Bossuet and Fénelon, ended in part by sickening men of religion and in part by making them aware of the intellectual weaknesses of the Church. The Revocation of the Edict was welcomed when it came; but it was not long before men felt that the economic price of religious unity was too high. The grim devotion by which Louis XIV, in his later years, sought to atone for the licence of his youth provoked an hypocrisy and a disgust of which the Regency was the inevitable price. By 1715 the renaissance in religion over which men like St Francis of Sales had presided was in total ruin. A general scepticism was created, and in that atmosphere the seeds sown by men like Bayle naturally yielded an unlooked-for harvest.

The seventeenth century, moreover, was the epoch of monarchical absolutism. Opposition to Louis had ceased altogether; he was the unchallenged master of the lives and fortunes of his subjects. What had he done with his power? The answer to that question is to be found in the formidable literature of indictment framed against him by the most distinguished figures of the latter part of his reign. The economic devastation is shown by Vauban and Bois-Guillebert, in the dispatches of the Intendants, and in an unforgettable picture of the common people from the acid pen of La Bruyère. The political folly of Louis's system is insisted upon not only

by great nobles like Saint-Simon, or lesser aristocrats like Boulainvilliers; it is shown with passionate accuracy by the despairing Protestants. I omit the prejudiced account of Jurieu, since he appears definitely to have been a spy in the pay of William III. But who can read the descriptions of the noble-minded Claude, of the cool and sceptical Bayle, of the author of the unanswerable *Soupirs de la France esclave*, without an irresistible sense of their truth? And their tale is amply confirmed by those letters and pamphlets of Fénelon which seem, in their noble indignation, to have recaptured the spirit and the eloquence of a prophet of old. Their case against Louis XIV is an unanswerable one. His unnecessary wars, his personal extravagance, his reduction of the aristocrat to the position of that courtier so exactly defined by Dr Johnson, the complete breakdown of the financial and economic system, the capricious and largely ignorant use of literary and artistic patronage, the moral disaster of a social system which stifled initiative by impressing with increasing intensity as we descend in the social scale the sense of inferiority—all this was a heavy tribute to levy upon a nation. It is no cause for wonder that the death of Louis was welcomed on all hands as a release from burdensome trammels. He had broken the ancient alliance between the French monarch and his people. Never after him did the Royalist idea act as an institutional force upon the mind of France. It had so completely failed to justify its power that men no longer looked to it for leadership. The lesson of its failure was the lesson of self-confidence. Classes which had trusted to it for protection now found that they must trust to themselves. And the history of the eighteenth century is the growing realisation of a class which, as a social group, had thus far played no part in the history of the *ancien régime* that its institutions were incompatible with its urgent need to control its own destiny. The whole temper we must seek to seize was thus not the sudden product of a group of bizarre thinkers, but the inevitable inference from facts of which grim experience had taught the inescapable burden.

It is, perhaps, symptomatic of the temper that develops that, whereas in the seventeenth century intellectual work is mainly built round the patronage of the Court, in the eighteenth

century it practically ignores the necessity for that enslavement. Voltaire is the uncrowned king of a realm more real and wider by far in its influence than that of Versailles; d'Alembert and Rousseau, Diderot and Mably, in striking contrast with Boileau and Racine, call no man master. Where Vauban could not survive the hint of royal displeasure Marmontel and Morellet, Diderot and Voltaire, wear their imprisonment as a proof of quality and courage. Every one knows the famous passages in which stout *bourgeois* like Barbier and retired officials like d'Argenson recount the rise of the power of public opinion. The memoirs of noblemen like Ségur reveal to us how the swelling tide of liberal sentiment captured the very class it was destined to engulf. No one suspects Mme du Deffand of sympathy with the new ideas; and yet, because for her the whole quality of life resided in the contact of mind with mind, it was with the new forces that she had to build her life. In the seventeenth century she would have solaced her interminable darkness with the attractive preciosity of Voiture, or Chapelain, or Mme de Lafayette; in the eighteenth she is dependent upon d'Alembert and Voltaire and that Mlle de Lespinasse whom merely to read of is to love. In the seventeenth century no voice of authority is raised against the Revocation; in the eighteenth a whole multitude follows with reverent admiration Voltaire's vindication of Calas and de la Barre. The seventeenth century could not even have conceived the *Encyclopædia*; for its essence is a challenge to every principle by which the classical monarchy took its stand. But to the eighteenth century its suppression was a national misfortune which aroused the equal anger of conservatives like Barbier and liberals like Malesherbes—himself, let us note, the director of the censorship. One is tempted to remark that in the seventeenth century the great man of letters is, at most, a divine plaything; to its successor he is the spiritual leader of the nation. Clearly we are in the presence of a new world.

III

Let us try to trace, in such detail as we may, the character of its intellectual frontiers. There is a sense in which one of them, at least, is traced by the philosophy of Candide. He

may experience the whole gamut of human misery, but in the end we leave him cultivating his garden. Why? Because he has courage enough still to believe in the power of reason to conquer the future. He is optimistic because he is rationalist. The world, as Voltaire said, may be the lunatic asylum of the planets, yet in the end it is governed by the sages. That is why the outstanding books—at any rate, until the emergence of Rousseau—are all of them deliberate essays in rationalism. The *Lettres anglaises* of Voltaire is not an account of England, but a description of what English rationalism is, and what triumphs, especially in the field of social affairs, may be accredited to its account. The *Lettres persanes* is the picture of contemporary France that a rational observer would draw; and the *Esprit des lois* is, above all, an attempt to find the nature of legal rationalism. The *Encyclopædia* itself is nothing so much as a huge repertory of all that rationalism has so far been able to establish.

What does this rationalism mean? It is essentially an attempt to apply the principles of Cartesianism to human affairs. Take as postulates the inescapable evidence of stout common sense, and reason logically from them to the conclusions they imply. That common sense, all the philosophers believed, will give everywhere the same results; what it is to the sage of Ferney it will be in Pekin or the woods of America. It is a kind of psychological geometry built upon the belief that human nature is everywhere the same. With La Mettrie or Helvétius, with Buffon or Condillac, we can trace from the characters we put one by one upon the *tabula rasa* of the mind what human nature is bound to be when it issues forth in social action.

With the obvious weaknesses of this method, which Diderot saw as early as 1754, I am not here concerned. It is more important for us to dwell upon its consequences in the event. It insists, first of all, upon the application of rationalism to religion. Diderot does not see why religions which proclaim their truth should not convince common sense of their adequacy by clear and obvious proof; for that is demanded of all the sciences. It is not often, indeed, that the demand is so definitely made. The more usual method is that of the *Encyclopædia*, which offers the authority of the Church for truths

which it has already made impossible of acceptance by its method of stating them.

But once religion is asked to prove itself it cannot maintain its particular dogmas. It must submit to the demands of a universal common sense, which means that what is true of Christianity must be true also of Buddhism, or Islam, or the faith of the Incas. And, therefore, it is necessary to purge religious belief of absurdities due to ancient superstition, or priestly invention, and take as true only that which commends itself to the reason of universal man. There thus emerges the famous natural religion of the philosophers, the faith of Voltaire and Montesquieu, of d'Alembert and Condorcet. There is a God Who created the world. He gave to men a sense of right and evil and a soul which may or may not be immortal, and thus may or may not be punished or rewarded in the after-life. This is all that a rational man is entitled to believe, and any particular religious creed which adds its private dogmas thereto is merely building upon dupery and chicane. For the history of any particular religion—especially, Voltaire would add, the history of Christianity—shows us an ignorant mass, fearful of a mysterious power beyond, and willing to pay an exploiting priesthood for protection against its anger. Dogmatic religion is the armoury of that exploiting priesthood. And, accordingly, the rational man will regard dogma and its institutions as the infamous that he must crush at all costs.

Some, indeed, were willing to go farther. The eighteenth-century materialists are, relatively, a small school of thought, but their urgency of conviction and the ability with which they stated their case enabled them to drive their more timid colleagues to lengths greater than they might otherwise have been anxious to go. Helvétius shows us a philosopher hovering uneasily upon its confines; with Holbach and Diderot, with the Abbé Meslier and Naigeon, with La Mettrie, we are in the midstream of materialistic atheism. The world, they say, is composed of a single element, matter; it appears in the most various forms, as vegetable or animal or mineral; it is organic and inorganic, living and dead. With Diderot the philosophy of materialism is no mere assertion, but a carefully built system made from observation and experiment. He

notes the rigorous bond between body and soul, the way in which a change in physical constitution may affect our spiritual outlook. He concludes that matter and spirit are identical; that it is as illogical to postulate a spiritual principle to explain the mind as for a peasant to argue that a watch moves because some demon animates the hands.

The atheists, as I say, were small in numbers, and, in the case of Diderot at least, their influence was personal rather than public. What gave them power was their alliance with the more moderate school to demand religious toleration. Here, once more, what they had to say was in nowise new. Everything that can be said for tolerance is already said magistrally by Bayle. But the power of the Church was enormous even in the eighteenth century, and to batter down its defences was a formidable task. The philosophers, certainly, neglected no weapon they could use. They translated the English defenders of toleration, like Locke. They abounded in irony and invective against the proponents of persecution. Montesquieu, in the *Lettres persanes* and the *Esprit des lois*, d'Argenson, Voltaire in a hundred pamphlets, make the case for reasonableness overwhelming. Little by little they gained the day. Their triumph must have been manifest even to their opponents when young theorists of the Sorbonne, like Turgot and Morellet, agree among themselves that intolerance is impossible, and join their effort to that of the philosophers as soon as they enter the world. After 1760 persecution found but few defenders who, like the Abbé Caveyrac, were prepared to justify it; and the feeling that fanaticism was contemptible was completed by such judicial tragedies as those of Calas and Sirven and de la Barre. One need not argue that the methods of their campaign were always honourable, or that the substance of their attack was invariably just. But it must be remembered that they were fighting an opponent whose methods were still those of the stake and the galleys. Huguenot ministers were still being hanged; Protestant children were still, at a tender age, being forcibly immured in convents. To make Joan of Arc the basis of an indecent poem, to attribute the Crusades to the meanest motives of which man is capable, to regard St Francis of Assisi as no more than a mystic madman, these are indefensible errors of taste. But much is, after all,

intelligible in men who were fighting the battle of reason against a power without mercy for its opponents.

The consequences of their victory were enormous. They not only won for rationalism an empire which had hitherto resisted the whole impact of its invasion. They made certain the victory of the principle that a political State cannot place itself at the disposal of a religious organisation, at least within the confines of Western civilisation. They saw with indisputable clarity the consequences of their victory. Deny the truth of revealed religion, and morality must discover other than religious foundations. Until their time it is not unfair to suggest that moral principle was regarded as essentially inherent in religious belief. They insisted upon the divorce of the two. Here, again, their effort was not new; they merely developed a doctrine already set out completely in Bayle's famous *Pensées sur la comète*, where he showed that a society of atheists would not necessarily be immoral. What Bayle said to the scandal of his generation they said, broadly speaking, to the satisfaction of their own. They were helped, doubtless, by influences on which Bayle could not rely. The writers of Utopias, like Fénelon and Ramsay, had already familiarised Frenchmen with the view that morality and paganism were not incompatible; and innumerable travellers had brought back accounts of tribes which, though innocent of Catholic dogma, led a life of notable virtue. Yet it was important to make the explicit affirmation of independence. What, asked Toussaint in his *Mœurs*, is virtue? "It is," he replies, "a faithful constancy in fulfilling the obligations Reason creates in us." Bayle apart, that could hardly have been said in the seventeenth century.

It is a little surprising to note how rapidly this view made its way, for, obviously, if it is true a large part of the utility of religious institutions disappeared. It makes an end of supernatural sanction and the revelation of divine law as the source of moral conduct. The problem of its proof was not an easy one. It was natural for Rousseau to argue that the moral sense was an instinct with an imperative claim, for he was but tenuously attached to the philosophic outlook; and there are even occasions when Voltaire, though with hesitation, was a partisan of this view. But to a generation which had learned

from Locke to reject innate ideas the idea of a moral instinct was necessarily unsatisfactory. Morality is therefore explained, as by La Mettrie and Helvétius, as the natural consequence of social experience. We live the same lives, we encounter the same impressions. We learn therefrom the obvious convenience of accepting the same rules in the field of conduct. Morality is thus an experimental science. It is not built upon constraint. Man is no longer the product of original sin. He is entitled to be happy, and this involves the full enjoyment of his natural passions. But these can only give us happiness as they function in a social way. Voltaire, Mably, Diderot, Holbach, all combine, from their different standpoints, to explain that nothing more satisfies the individual passion than its devotion to social good. Mably, Holbach, and Saint-Lambert write catechisms of lay morality whereby the legislator may teach men in these terms their duty to their neighbour and their country. For Rousseau, indeed, as the *Contrat social* shows, this view was utterly inadequate; but there is perhaps no point on which he was more clearly separated from his contemporaries than in his insistence upon the need for a religious foundation of civic action.

IV

Once the problems of religion and morals had come within the purview of the philosopher it was natural and logical that he should extend his survey to the political field. The problem of interpretation here is much more complex than in issues of religious or ethical controversy. The tradition of speculation, to begin with, was much more faint. Frenchmen had hardly discussed the foundations of politics since the epoch of the wars of religion. Among the innumerable pamphlets of the Fronde there are hardly more than half a dozen which demand more than the redress of particular grievances; and even the literature of protest under Louis XIV is innocent of any thoroughgoing radicalism. Bayle's political outlook is the essential conservatism of the scholar to whom disturbance is the supreme evil. Jurieu may preach the sovereignty of the people; but there is no sign that he desired to make the doctrine one of wide or profound application. It

is notable that after Vauban and Bois-Guillebert had discussed the amazing economic distress they scrupulously abstain from any discussion of its impact upon matters of ultimate political constitution. The whole mind of Fénelon or Saint-Simon looks backward to a dead past for its inspiration, and ignores, almost completely, the living reality with which it was confronted. Barbeyrac, in his commentaries on Grotius and Pufendorf, was bolder; but, like Jurieu, he was living in exile. The little group which, under the leadership of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, formed the Club de l'Entresol in the time of Fleury, to discuss political questions, does not seem to have made any startling affirmations, and it timidly accepted its suppression by the Minister as in the nature of things. Nor, at any rate until 1730, were English ideas influential. For England was long held in horror for the execution of Charles I, and such English treatises as were translated—Hobbes, for example—would not have aided the critical examination of a despotic system. It is not, I think, unreasonable to say that, until twenty years after their publication, the mind was rare which doubted the adequacy of Bossuet's political ideas.

Not, of course, that change is not in the air. Its presence may be discerned in the unforgettable bitterness of La Bruyère. It is apparent in the immediate inability of the monarchy under Louis XV to sustain either the prestige or the authority of its predecessor. There are countless passages in Marais and Barbier and d'Argenson which point to the definite existence of a new spirit, the precise extent of which men are not able to gauge. The Utopias of Vairasse and Sadeur would not be egalitarian if that aspiration did not correspond to a wide and felt need; for we could not otherwise explain their popularity. Obviously, too, a reason which believed both in its right and power to solve the problems of chemistry and physics, of ethics and religion, would insist on the extension of its empire. If Voltaire at thirty can express his mind in England, but not in France, being Voltaire, he is bound to ask why and to protest against the limitation. That insatiable curiosity which was Montesquieu was bound, also, after his famous visit to England and Holland, to probe the secret of its political method. Was there, he could not but ask, as Temple had inquired, half a century earlier, some mysterious affinity between prosperity

and political freedom? Rationalism, accordingly, has its hands upon politics from the outset; and the degree of its analysis was merely a matter of time. Yet do not let us forget the timidity or the indirectness of the approach. Montesquieu may, in the *Lettres persanes*, discuss political and economic questions. But Usbek is a Persian writing to Ispahan, and he uses a thousand nuances and distractions to conceal the boldness of his ideas. Men, even after 1750, write always with a sense of excessive temerity upon these issues; and, until the very verge of the Revolution, the censorship does not fail to correct their liability to frankness. The censorship, indeed, is always a little ashamed and incomplete; and, as with Malesherbes, it has its moments of forgetfulness. But it is always there to remind the philosopher that the price of despotism is eternal constraint.

When the philosophers at last move to the citadel of politics what is in their minds? As one would expect, their ideas are a reflection of their situation. They are interested, above all, in social freedom, in the effort to secure for the individual protection from arbitrary interference in his private life. Their discussion of political institutions revolves always about that vital centre simply because that is the main experience they have known. What interests Voltaire in England is the boldness which can criticise without restraint (less admirable, in fact, than he knew) established institutions, the control of Parliament by the electorate, the power of the purse as an instrument for restraining monarchical authority. So with Montesquieu the ideal is a system in which, from the equilibrium of powers, social freedom necessarily emerges. All constitutions come within his ken; but the standpoint from which all his values are ultimately fixed is his belief in an individual citizen whose life is unfettered by wanton attack. There is little zeal for democratic institutions in the majority of writers. Meslier may propound in secret his passionate dithyramb to the Revolution; but his thoughts on the need for catastrophic change were unknown to his contemporaries. Mably and Morelly may be so impressed by the consequences of economic inequality as to propound communistic solutions, but neither is, I think, in the mainstream of political thought. They are significant, indeed, of a nuance of temper which

gathered immense force after it had become evident that the Revolution was to profit but little the working-classes. For his own day, Morelly's Utopia was merely an attractive literary exercise; and the pessimism of Mably about his own ideals shows clearly that he himself considered them meat too strong for the digestion of his own contemporaries. His practical proposals, in fact, are remarkably moderate. Like his own master, Plato, he understood that his ideal republic was a pattern laid up in heaven, and, like him, he wrote a simpler version for a generation too little heroic to be capable of the larger sacrifices he desired.

If we omit Rousseau and the Physiocrats, who had each ideas quite special to themselves, we can generalise with some confidence about the common temper. All the philosophers, broadly speaking, combine to demand a constitutional government. They want religious toleration, civil freedom, the right to criticise, a rational jurisprudence, a fair system of taxation, the abolition of special privileges for the aristocracy. For the most part they do not condemn a limited monarchy, though Voltaire has his moments of ardent republicanism. They are not in the least democratic; on the contrary, as with Voltaire, they have a genuine fear of the multitude, and some of them, Voltaire included, are not even certain that popular ignorance is not a means to social security. This is not, indeed, true of Diderot, to whom the instruction of the people is the basis of social well-being. But, in general, the philosophers are conscious of themselves as an *élite* whose rights and capacities are different from those of the common herd. They are stout *bourgeois* to whom the rights of property are fundamental; and it is amusing to note in Barbier the sense of that *juste milieu* which Guizot was later to make the basis of a disastrous adventure.

It is important to examine the methods by which these results were reached; for they reveal more of the mind of the age than the conclusions themselves. Partly, at least, they are more like a psychological geometry than anything else. They postulate a human nature, and deduce from the laws with which they have endowed it the rules and ideals it ought to obey. Of time and space they make entire abstraction. Man, for them, is the same in Paris as in Pekin; and an ancient

Roman would have recognised his habits in the predispositions of one of Mably's citizens. There is no sense of the historical element in politics. Variety of fact is not allowed to disturb their desire for ample and simple conclusions. Even Voltaire, who, in the *Essai sur les mœurs*, in some sort founded the modern study of history, writes as though an Iroquois or a Chinaman were not very different from a sophisticated Parisian of eighteenth-century Paris.

Yet, by the middle of the century, the inadequacy of this purely *a priori* method is obvious to almost every one. It was evident that diversity of fact made nonsense of simplicity of principle. It then became the fashion to seek for knowledge of what is original in the nature of men, to find the universal elements which seem, in fact, to be independent of time and place. Because these are universal they are accepted as legitimate, and the business of the political philosopher is then the discovery of reasonable means for their satisfaction. This method arose quite naturally from the voyages and Utopias of the time; and it is, of course, the method upon which Rousseau relied in the first two *Discours*. It is the method also of Helvétius and of Holbach, and its philosophic defence is derived from the psychology which Locke and Condillac had made the grand commonplace of the time. If we take, for instance, the *Politique naturelle* of Holbach (1773)—an unduly neglected book—we find the portrait of a man whose primordial needs can be known. These, because they are primordial, are natural, and reason can assure their satisfaction. We have an egoistic and an altruistic instinct which enables man to consent to sacrifice for the common interest. From these can be built, by the association of ideas, the whole complex mechanism of modern society. I use the word mechanism advisedly; for there is obviously a definite element of Cartesian automatism in this outlook. Society is here a machine constructed of parts which can be taken to pieces and put together again by reason; and reason, therefore, enables us to explain the rights of citizens, the functions of government, the method of education most fitted to the best results. One is irresistibly reminded of modern social psychology, which, with a bundle of denominated impulses, was prepared to correct the old world and boldly to plan a new.

Another aspect of this approach is analysis not by way of original and universal human nature, but of primitive society. That has many obvious merits. The problem of how an individual passes into a social tradition can be evaded; and by taking a society as given we do not fall into the difficulty which arises when political method is approximated to physical analysis. By searching the elements of primitive social organisation the theorists are able, at the same time, to discover what is primitive, and therefore natural, in the society about them. The method is seen, perhaps at its best, in the second *Discours* of Rousseau. The notes he added to the text show that he had taken real care to acquaint himself with the existing accounts of primitive societies. They show, also, that for the end he had in view the amount of fact at his disposal is small. What, therefore, he does is to add to his knowledge inferences of what must, rationally, have been in order to complete the picture. We begin with a communistic society in which there is neither property nor the division of labour. Let a man once enclose a plot of ground, and, step by step, we can deduce by logic all that must have occurred in the development of inequality. From Rousseau's angle, particularly, the method is invaluable. It not only enabled him, with the support of innumerable travellers' tales—the relations, for example, of missionaries whose good faith was not suspected—to insist upon the superiority of the primitive over civilised life, to argue that, in fact, modern society is a deformation of human nature. It gave also to his hypothetical reconstructions a supposed groundwork in the facts of infinite value in its propagation as a system of ideas. When he and a hundred others—Morelly, Raynal, Brissot de Warville, even an enemy of the philosophers, like Linguet—vaunt the noble savage and nature's simple plan they are engaged upon the urgent task of justifying human nature to itself. We must not miss the effect of these ideas upon such theological dogmas as original sin, nor, in another field, miss their application, both widespread and influential, to the demand for the abolition of slavery.

From methods such as these two conclusions emerge. The philosophers are clear that an analysis of human nature is, at the same time, a solid proof of progress. If we compare,

they say, Newton or Locke or Bacon even with the wisest of the ancients or the primitives it is evident that the advance is real. Let their spirit and its results pervade society, and we have the right, as d'Alembert and Condorcet both eloquently insist, to believe that reason can assure the happiness of men. And even the theory of primitive superiority leads to the elevation of rationalism. For what, it teaches, is wrong with modern society is those elements which are not the natural developments of its basic principles. Reason alone can distinguish between them, and reason alone, therefore, is the sovereign guide to well-being. Rousseau, I need not say, would have rejected this view. But it is one of the explanations, for example, of the communism of Meslier and Morelly, and when sentiment becomes an operative agent in the control of ideas that type of thought becomes a factor of great importance. For, as certain strands of the Revolution showed, when it is linked to the facts of the economic *régime* it becomes, as supremely with Babeuf, a rallying-cry for the disinherited. It failed, of course, because it was before its time. Yet its intellectual affiliations show how deeply rooted it was in a fundamental attitude of the age.

Here, however, we must make an important distinction. Every one knows Taine's famous picture of a nation made drunk by the classical spirit of abstract reason; and thinkers as eminent as Tocqueville and Cournot have spoken, if less excessively, in a similar sense. Let us, therefore, remember that the age of deduction is also an inductive age. What men have to say is built, after all, upon a fairly wide basis of direct observation. Every one travels, Voltaire to England, Germany, and Switzerland, Montesquieu to Holland, Italy, and England, Diderot to Holland, Germany, and Russia. The passion for travel, and for reflection upon the diversity therein encountered, is one of the most real qualities of the time; the vast collections of voyages alone prove that. What M. Chinard has called *l'exotisme* is based, above all, upon a sincere appreciation of the need to recognise the ultimate stubbornness of variety. Often enough, doubtless, this *exotisme* is merely precious or attitudinising; when it deals with Persia or Babylon or China one must, as a rule, throw up one's hands. But when geography is linked with history it produces the

Essai sur les mœurs of Voltaire and the *Esprit des lois*. These, if they are anything, are careful generalisations built from a patient and laborious study of the best knowledge then available. With Montesquieu, they lead to a perception that reason has its limitations. Institutions, he sees clearly enough, are not infinitely malleable; they are a function of climate and race and tradition. His famous definition of law is already nothing so much as a perception that institutional truth is necessarily relative. Men who live differently think differently, and he knows well enough that a different thought is not necessarily an inferior thought. The good in law is for him not that which is common to all peoples, but that which best suits the particular people for whom it is intended.

Montesquieu, perhaps, is the supreme realist of the age; but we must not conceive of his revolt from the abstract as in any sense singular to himself. It is found in the natural sciences: positively, as in the experiments of Réaumur and Nollet; negatively, as in the scepticism of Buffon's vast edifice, which all the great scientists seem to have felt. It is found, too, in literature, where the discovery of English and German works makes it apparent that universal rules are dubious, that, as Diderot said, it is the happy influence of manners, habit, and climate which produces the great books. There is even doubt whether beauty is, after all, an absolute; and Diderot's article "Beau" in the *Encyclopædia* is nothing so much as an indictment of Boileau and the classical spirit. The same may be said of educational practice. In this, the most obstinate of conservative strongholds, it is permissible to argue that *Émile* conquered its generation. When the Jesuits were expelled from France in 1762 the change in educational method which occurred in their transferred schools amounted to a revolution. Latin, doubtless, retained its pre-eminence, but at long last French became the usual vehicle for instruction, and the natural sciences won a place in the curriculum. Education begins to be conceived as essentially a guide to practical life. Nor must we forget the similar movement in the economic field. The work of Quesnay, of Mercier de la Rivière, of Dupont de Nemours, seems rigorously deductive enough. But we must set it in the context of agricultural experiments like those of Mirabeau *père*, of the innumerable

studies of observation to be found in the *Éphémérides* and the proceedings of agricultural societies, of solid factual studies, like those of Forbonnais upon the history of French finance. The men who influenced the age were, for the most part, not merely men of the study. Montesquieu was judge as well as jurist; Turgot was a great Intendant as well as a defeated Minister; Helvétius was not only a farmer-general, but a great landlord deeply loved for his careful administration of his estate; few writers have shown more admirable qualities as man of business than Voltaire; and even Mably was secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Even those without such practical knowledge, Diderot, Rousseau, Condorcet, mingled with these men and shared their hopes and fears. When they wrote they were not spinning their webs from idle dreams, but building upon a knowledge of the reality about them.

That, I conceive, can be proved from the books themselves. It is obvious enough in Montesquieu and Voltaire; indeed, the impatience of the latter with all system-making in politics is notorious. It is clear from the chapters in which Holbach demonstrates that there cannot be an ideal form of government. Mably is abstract and rationalist enough; but even he insists that we must take account, in all our systems, of the passions and the ignorance of men. Condorcet may put on record his desire for a cosmopolitan society in which the law is made by an Areopagus of philosophers; but Condorcet is as ardent as any for experiment, observation, the recognition that we must square our desires with the facts. He is even doubtful whether the citizen without property is entitled to the rights of man. It would not be difficult to paint a Diderot whose political speculations shatter the foundations of all existing systems. But there is the realist Diderot of the *Encyclopædia*, whose programme is simply the rejection of divine right, the limitation of privilege, the grant of a constitution, the recognition of civil liberty. Democracy, he thinks, is suitable only to small States, and he will not approve "the chimera of absolute equality." Rousseau is often cited upon the other side; and, in a sense, the *Contrat social* is the supreme proof of Taine's generalisation. But alongside the Rousseau of the *Contrat social* we must put the Rousseau careful for Genevese tradition in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, the Rousseau, conservative, realist,

even timid, of the *Lettre à M. Buttafoco* and of the *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, the Rousseau, finally, of the *Lettres écrites de la montagne*, who will have no traffic with his supporters who dream of a revolution in Geneva. Whatever the men of 1789 learned from their precursors, they could not have failed to find there an insistence upon the need for social discipline, a care for the difficulties of adapting principles to practice, which are notable and outstanding. Upon sober examination the abstract reason of the age turns out not to have been so very abstract after all.

V

Exactly as the rationalism of the eighteenth century was merely the logical development of the Cartesianism of its predecessor, so, also, its romantic aspect is easily discoverable in the preceding age. Reasonableness in religion may have been the dominant *credo* of Bossuet and Bourdaloue; but the mysticism of St Francis of Sales, and the Quietist controversy, in which Fénelon was the protagonist, show clearly enough that other influences were at work. This effort to build a religion from the revelations of the heart rather than from the intimations of mind joins hands with the effort of those whom La Bruyère called "les esprits forts" to make pleasure a criterion of action which challenges the competence of reason to be the sole judge of the conduct a man should pursue. By the end of the century there has developed what may, perhaps, be termed a morality of sentiment hardly less important than the morality of reason. Its roots are extraordinarily complex. It is already fairly clear in Molière and La Fontaine. It is insistent in Saint-Évremond. Its thesis seems to be that life must be justified as it is, without the undue submission of its content to a body of rules imposed from without. To want passionately is to want rightly; to feel deeply is to feel truly. Long before Rousseau gave to romanticism its letters of credit it had become an integral part of the mind of the age.

Yet what it essentially became Rousseau made it, and it is in the terms of his attitude that we must consider its claims. For in his hands it became not merely a vague sense of the inadequacy of reason, but a very definite philosophy aimed to

contest the supremacy of rationalism; as he himself said, "one must kill the other." With him, as always, the challenge is a product of the most intimate experience. He had wished to be a philosopher, but life had taught him that the promptings of his heart were superior to the logic of his mind. He found truth not in the discussions of the *salon*, but in those lonely wanderings round Montmorency, where, in the silent voice of nature, he seemed to be at one with its eternal principles. It is, therefore, to the inner revelation of conscience that he pins his trust. Reason, he concludes, can build nothing. It leads only to hopeless cynicism, as in Wolmar, and its foundations are a deceitful pride. But the heart leads us to God, and God, by the divine instinct of conscience, to virtue. We know therefrom, and, what is better, we feel, that there are rules of life which go deeper and remain truer than anything the logic of the philosophers can establish. The rules our conscience gives us satisfy our yearning for a harmonious existence. They cannot be demonstrated. But they make Julie live a life of virtue. They are true because their results are satisfactory.

I do not need to explain that this romantic outlook provoked an antagonism as passionate as any the orthodox religion had encountered. The pamphlets of Voltaire, the pastoral letter of the Archbishop of Paris, the famous persecution of Rousseau by the authorities at Geneva—these are merely incidents in a campaign of which the fury knew no bounds. What Rousseau was preaching was a Calvinism without dogma, a justification by a faith taught by incommunicable voices. It was an onslaught on reason and authority which went to the root of their claims. For it discovered the individual in society as the centre upon which all social action turns. Social rules, however established, were to submit themselves to a test of sentiment, which, in the end, became the sovereign judge of action. To the Church, not less than to the philosophers, this seemed the coronation of anarchy. To the one he opposed a religion of inner conscience which annihilated the validity of its official tradition; to the other a claim of the heart which began by denial of the right of reason to its empire. And from the rapid hold he obtained upon the mind of the generation it is clear that the revolution he wrought was more than due. The Voltairean method had exhausted its original potency; the

criticisms of Moreau and Barruel, which now read to us so tediously, would not have had their success had it been otherwise. Rousseau came to affirm in an age where negation seemed to have triumphed, where, yet, its triumph had already brought a certain weariness of the spirit. There comes an immense revival of the belief in Providence and the simple virtues, a recreation of a Christianity of which the Savoyard Vicar is the noble embodiment. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Sébastien Mercier, even semi-philosophers like Marmontel, are only instances of the degree to which the new religion of the individual heart, the insistence on the truths of inner enthusiasm, established their dominion.

I do not mean, of course, to assert that Rousseau incarnated in himself the new creed. There are aspects of it with which he had no connexion; Edward Young and Goethe, for instance, contributed to romantic sensibility elements to which Rousseau was entirely a stranger. There are sources which deepen its influence—the drama, for example, of Nivelle de la Chaussée in France and Lillo in England, with which he had no concern. And once the Romantic movement had entered its kingdom it became more various by far than its chief sponsors would have approved, or even deemed possible. In politics, assuredly, it begets traditions so different that it becomes an infinitely difficult task to trace them to their common source. Burke, for instance, is outstanding among the critics of Rousseau; yet there is nothing more fundamental in Burke than the sense in which he was Rousseau's disciple. Romanticism becomes a politics of the unconscious, an acceptance of tradition as the mastering influence in men's lives, which links it, through philosophic idealism, with the tactic of historic conservatism. But this is, relatively, a late development, dating essentially from Hegel, though it is already implicit in Rousseau himself. What is immediately important, in the social field, is its revolutionary side. There, not less certainly, it begat an amazing progeny. Babeuf, Fourier, and Lamennais in France, Shelley and Godwin in England, Marx, through Hegel, in Germany, are only instances of the impress that it made. We have to try, in some sort, to probe the principles out of which this revolutionary element emerged.

Their main source in Rousseau is, I think, obvious enough. You cannot exalt the dictates of the heart without insisting, at the same time, upon the dogma of equality in every field of social action. For if what my conscience dictates is the supreme arbiter of what I ought to do, no other can be rightfully the master of my person. Law, then, is justified not by its source, nor by what it contains, but by my judgment of it, by the degree, that is, to which it embodies my own sense of the things law ought to do. Romanticism, in this aspect, is obviously unfavourable to authority. It calls upon the latter to justify itself by proving the conformity of its ideals with those of the mass of men. Romanticism, that is to say, is democratic. It asks for the rule of the majority, the right, that is, of the consciences of the multitude to prevail. And here, of course, it is of supreme importance not only that Rousseau himself was of the people, but that, also, perhaps first among the great men of letters, he proudly defended the class from which he sprang. His own pathological sensitiveness makes it impossible for him to accept the hierarchical structure of the society he sought to conquer. To live according to nature becomes, for him, to make an end of those refinements of civilisation which seemed, as he urged, to invite luxury, aristocracy, control, on the one side, and poverty and submission upon the other. Alongside the life of the *salon* or of Ferney he puts the life of the Hermitage or Les Charmettes as the life to which man has been called by nature. But that is a life within the power, as he believes, of the average man. It is not attainable within the confines of the society about him. If it is to be achieved there must be a revolution in the spirit of man, of which the *Contrat social* traces the basic programme. Establish, he seems to say, social institutions in which there are equal rights available to all and the goodness inherent in the hearts of men will reassert itself. It is even worth noting that what may be called the primitive elements in the *Contrat social*, the civil religion and the device of the legislator, are not without significance in this context. They are recognisable, I venture to believe, as the supreme source of that attitude to dictatorship which is an integral part of revolutionary romanticism. Once the ideas it maintained had become conscious of their power, it was inevitable that they should seek the

means of direct translation into terms of social structure. They are a doctrine armed, a religion; and, like all militant creeds, they demand an army for their imposition.

One other remark must be made in this context. How central is the influence of Rousseau in this movement it is not necessary to insist. But it is important to bear in mind that with Rousseau it has a special character. It is not for nothing that he was a son of Calvinist Geneva, and I do not think we do injustice to his essential ideas if we call him the parent of Puritan romanticism. For he did not argue, as did others about him, that the rights of sentiment are unlimited. He did not conceive that there was an antinomy between the teaching of the heart and the principles of nature. The passion he exalts is always the passion for virtue, the zeal for duty, the enthusiasm for simplicity. It would even be true to say that the inner voice to which he listened taught him less the duty of revolt than the lesson of infinite resignation. It insists that he must restore the moral foundations of his epoch, revivify its religion, and purify its manners. No one who reads the innumerable letters of his correspondents can doubt that for them he was more than anything else a father-confessor whose principles had the force of a categorical imperative; and this is true whether the writer is prince in one country or humble student in another. There is, of course, something in Rousseau other than the preceptor of simplicity, even of asceticism. But that essential Protestantism in his work is the point of departure from which not the least part of his influence takes its origin. For himself, perhaps, it was more important than any other, and, because for himself, it is a reason for resignation; it is one of the reasons why the accusation that he was a protagonist of anarchy left him at once so embittered and so confounded.

VI

What both the philosophers and the romantics gradually built up may fairly be termed a religion of service to one's fellow-men. Their conception of the State is of an organisation which owes itself to the well-being of its fellow-citizens; that is why Diderot, Holbach, Turgot, Condorcet, are insistent that the good legislator is, in Mably's phrase, above all

moralist. That is why, also, they are so anxious to maintain that social organisation is founded upon an instinct of altruism. The sympathy which Adam Smith made the basis of his theory of the moral sentiments is, for them, at the basis of society. We cannot, they consistently maintain, be happy if others are unhappy; we are driven by an inner energy to share in their joys and sorrows. It is this outlook which makes humanitarian effort, what, after the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, the age liked to call *œuvres de bienfaisance*, so characteristic of the period. When Rousseau makes the Wolmars devote themselves to their dependents upon their estate they are pursuing an *œuvre de bienfaisance*. When the Abbé Baudeau outlines a scheme for the relief of the poor; when the Intendant Morfontaine crowns each year at Salency the best and most hard-working of the poor girls in the neighbourhood; when, at Canon, there is celebrated the "fête des bonnes gens"; when a forgotten economist can depict himself as "l'ami de ceux qui n'ont rien"; when the *Mercure de France* and the anti-philosophic *Année Littéraire* can have a section in which to canonise humanitarian effort, it is because the "sensitive heart" is responsive to a wider sense of social obligation. For whereas in the seventeenth century such effort as this would have been cast largely in a religious mould, in the eighteenth it has an aspect, hardly less important than the religious, which is purely secular in outlook.

We must not, however, imagine that the mentality I have been seeking to recapture was either widespread or established without opposition. We must not forget that the century of rationalists like Voltaire and Diderot is also the century of Mesmer and Cagliostro. We must not forget, either, that for every *salon* and provincial academy where the philosophic spirit raised its head there were a dozen where it would have seemed either insolent or blasphemous to take it at its own assumption. Hundreds of petty *seigneurs* and unnumbered lawyers and men of business remained to the end enfolded in their traditional life, as faithful as ever they were to Church and king. We are, in fact, liable to misjudge the proportions of the success won by the philosophers if we keep our eyes solely upon the fall of the *ancien régime*. If there are free-thinking nobles like d'Argenson, there are

also religious like the Duc de Croy. If there are houses, like that of Holbach, in which the Church is the infamous, there are also those, like that of Necker, frequented, let us remember, by the philosophers themselves, in which religious institutions were held in profound respect. Abundant contemporary evidence testifies to provincial places where either men had never heard of the philosophers or had heard of them only to detest them. The Parlement of Paris might struggle against the despotic changes of Maupeou; but, for Voltaire, it is hardly less an engine of obscurantism than the Church itself.

And almost down to the very eve of the Revolution, certainly to the Edict, which recognises the legality of Protestantism, the alliance between throne and altar continues, without shocking the mind of the generation. Indeed, it might be said without exaggeration that the alliance is intensified once it has been discovered that the philosophers are a party with principles which threaten the existing order. The edicts which forbid the printing of dangerous books are multiplied. The punishment of the humble booksellers who secretly traffic in forbidden literature grows stronger. In 1768 a woman was sentenced to imprisonment for life for selling Holbach's *Christianisme dévoilé*. Toussaint had to go into exile for his book on *Les Mœurs*. Montesquieu did not put his name on the title-page of his masterpiece. Helvétius, who did, was not only compelled to make a humiliating retraction, but was afraid to publish its sequel in his own lifetime. Buffon was driven to admit that the Sorbonne knew more than he of natural history. Voltaire was driven to a thousand expedients, some of them, at least, barely honourable, to conceal his authorship of his ablest polemical tracts. Few lampoons of the age were more successful than Moreau's attack upon the philosophers; and their loathing of Fréron is evidence enough that they were not entirely happy in the presence of his criticism. To the end of the *régime* the threat of imprisonment hung like a shadow on those who were unduly bold.

Yet it can hardly be doubted that, despite the counter-currents of traditional opinion, the new ideas made their

way steadily. The protection of the Pompadour, the capture of the Academy, the apotheosis of Voltaire, the performance of the *Mariage de Figaro*, are all of them incidents of which it is impossible to escape the significance. Barbier may detest the revival of a Frondeur spirit in the multitude; but he cannot deny its power. D'Argenson may express contempt for the effort of *gens de rien* like Voltaire and Diderot to form opinion; but the whole ethos of his mind is the half-conscious recognition that they are, in fact, forming it. The Sorbonne may condemn *Bélisaire*, but its censure merely provokes a ribald amusement. The decline in the number of communicants, as at Saint-Sulpice, the growth of freemasonry and illuminism—though it is fatally easy to exaggerate their importance—the increase in the number of newspapers, the growth of provincial academies, all testify to a change in the public temper. The Academy of Amiens actually made Rousseau the subject of its prize for eloquence; and at that Toulouse where Calas had been condemned it was discussed whether the name of Bayle should serve a similar purpose. When one turns over the innumerable and forgotten pamphlets of the last half-century of the *ancien régime* the influential names, the ideas that have given stimulus and conviction, are almost always those of the philosophers. Punishment would have been discussed even if Beccaria and Voltaire had not written a line; the revision of judicial procedure, public education, the place of commerce in the State, these are themes which do not require the philosophers for their discussion. But they would hardly have been discussed either as widely or intensely had not the philosophers directed the mind of the age. Anyone who reads the details of Mme Roland's youth, the transition in her outlook from a traditional religion to an ardent rationalism, will note with interest how it is effected by the books which we ourselves read as the proof that a new age is about to be born. When a religiously minded man like Bergasse, whose books are evidence of the depth of his conviction, can feel it his duty to go on pilgrimage to Rousseau and can admire Voltaire without outrage to his conscience, we can hardly doubt the impress upon it of the rationalist attitude. Foreign travellers have a similar tale to tell; and when we learn of the degree

to which the officers are influenced by the philosophic spirit its reality does not seem to need discussion.

A new spirit does not mean a revolutionary spirit. It is, of course, tempting to make it so, and Taine, very notably, succumbed to the temptation. When Barbier writes, in 1760, that there is "une grande fermentation dans les esprits au sujet de gouvernement" it is of economic misery due, mainly, to iniquitous taxation of which he is thinking. When d'Argenson predicts a revolution the phrase probably means little more than an expression of disappointed ambition. There is anger, there are local disorders, there is intense impatience, a decline in the vigour of the monarchical spirit, a widespread disbelief in aristocratic privilege. But what is demanded is reform, and it is still not untrue in 1789 to say that it was to the monarch that the nation looked for reform. Certainly it would be difficult to find an outstanding intelligence of the age who deliberately prepared, or consciously welcomed, catastrophe except Meslier; and his remarkable book was, on its political side, not only unknown to his generation, but was essentially a *cri de cœur* rather than a considered philosophy. No one knew better than Turgot the need for reform; but Turgot never seriously deviated from the principle of monarchical control. When Mlle de Lezardière wrote those eight notable volumes on French constitutionalism which made her the Mary Bateson of her time it was to the king that her father presented them as their obvious destination. It is, I think, true that the nation expected a constitution, that it was done with political and economic subjection, that it ardently favoured judicial reform. That there was a genuine undercurrent of revolutionary sentiment before 1789 can be seen in placards and songs which express a quite real demand for the overthrow of established authority. But neither the placards nor the songs were an organised effort; and where the philosophers mention them it is to condemn and not to approve. The revolutionary sentiment before the *débâcle* meant as much, or as little, as the Communist party in England to-day. Of itself it had no power to move the masses; and in itself there is no evidence that it commanded widespread allegiance. Events, indeed, might well quicken it into a new life and give

it wider significance. But it would not, even then, find response from the philosophers. They remained, to the end, quite definitely reformist in outlook. As late even as June 1789 Morellet could not conceal from a friend that the Third Estate had become "un peu outré dans ses vues et dans ses principes."

Yet the philosophers had done their task. They had discredited a whole system of ideas and institutions which no longer served the national advantage. They had made the principles of civil liberty and constitutional self-government the grand commonplaces of the time. We cannot, indeed, look to them for the causes of the Revolution; its roots, above all, lie deep in economic soil. Incurable financial mismanagement, an impossible system of taxation, bad harvests, violent fluctuations in the cost of living, a reckless pursuit of costly military adventure, these were the main agents of catastrophe. The *ancien régime* committed suicide; it was unable to cope with the consequences of its own ineptitude. It could not maintain its institutions in the face of its complete inability to pay its way. It was compelled, accordingly, to call the middle classes into counsel, and to accept their demands as the means of rehabilitation.

But it found that, in the process of time, the middle classes had become actuated by ideas incompatible with the traditional system of France. They had solid grievances to remedy. They had grown into a new self-respect and a new consciousness of power. Above all, perhaps, they had been the partners of the American Revolution. They had seen Franklin fêted in the *salons* of Paris. They were told to admire the adventure of Lafayette. After some hesitation they came to believe that American ideas were the natural expression of a rational philosophy. "The American cause seemed to be our own," wrote a contemporary observer, "and we were proud of their victories." After the peace which recognised American independence there was an obvious increase in the demand for reform. The very titles of the pamphlets, the articles in the newspapers, the popularity of Lafayette, the intense unpopularity of all effort at new taxation, all go to show that it could no longer be withstood. Ever since the time of Louis XIV the ancient

bond between monarch and people had been broken. It was necessary to find a new basis for authority; and when the States-General was at long last summoned it took the right, which belongs to every people, to assume control over its own destiny.

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II

BOSSUET

BOOKS which may fairly be considered as landmarks in the history of literature belong for the most part to one of two classes. They sum up the controversies of the past or open those of the coming generation."[1] The distinction, which Sir Leslie Stephen claims for Bossuet's *Histoire des variations*, of constituting "a summary of preceding thought," may be extended to the whole of his political writings. In them the defence of absolute monarchy was zealously and convincingly set forth. The very title of Bossuet's chief work on politics, *La Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte à Mgr le Dauphin*, is almost sufficient in itself to fix the century and country to which he belonged. In no century subsequent to the seventeenth, and in hardly any earlier, could an apologist have founded a scheme of political organisation exclusively upon the words of the Bible; and in no other *milieu* than the Court of Louis XIV could so glowing a eulogy of absolutism have been penned. But the circumstance which gave to Bossuet's writing its peculiar distinction served to emphasise the more decisively its contemporary reference. With the fall of the Bourbon dynasty in the eighteenth century the fame of Bossuet's political writings suffered a corresponding eclipse, and his *Politique* inspired neither commentators nor copyists. As an orator his genius was recognised still; but in the capacity of both theologian and political theorist his reputation shared the decline of the institutions which he had defended. His defence of scholasticism carried little conviction to the apostles of eighteenth-century rationalism, nor his championship of absolutism to the authors of revolution. He was the invincible protagonist for tradition and authority, but

[1] Sir Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. i, p. 74 (3rd edition, London, 1902).

his lot was cast in the last age before the deluge which swept away the *ancien régime* both in Church and State. As political philosopher no less than as theologian he placed the highest value upon the elements of stability and fixity in political and ecclesiastical institutions, and consistently ignored the factor of progress and the need of change.

It is the purpose of this present essay to examine the political writings of Bossuet. At the outset it must be observed that they were the outcome and the fruit of his theological speculation, which prejudiced him against the toleration of free discussion because of the dangers attendant upon liberty of thought from the standpoint of authoritarian societies. Nor was the political *milieu* of contemporary France any more favourable to the impartial consideration of the questions which are fundamental to political science. It would be difficult to imagine an intellectual atmosphere less congenial to the unfettered investigation of the origin and nature of civil government, or to the comparative study of monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic constitutions, than the flattery and adulation prevalent at the Court of Louis XIV. Throughout the kingdom of France *le Grand Monarque* was supreme. Desirous of retaining undivided authority in his own hands, he resolved to abolish the name and office of *Premier Ministre*, and to select his agents from the social classes which could not challenge their dependence on himself rather than from the ranks of the nobility or higher clergy. His government was absolute and, as such, did not welcome criticism. He was *le Roi Soleil*; and in the presence of the sun itself it ill became any other person to raise a miserable candle-flame against its all-pervading radiance. The function of ministers, courtiers, and Churchmen alike was simply to reflect the glory of the monarch. Thus the intellectual and literary activities of French writers of the reign of Louis XIV were confined to the composition of panegyrics; the mere whisper of criticism brought down ostracism and suppression upon the unhappy perpetrator, and studies which might lead to censure of the absolutist *régime* or even to comparison with other forms of government found no encouragement from the Bourbon sovereign.

It was not to be expected that such a tradition would

produce profound reflections upon the nature of political societies. Yet Bossuet did not merely belong to this tradition, but rather personified it. He was a member of the inner circle of the royal *entourage*, enjoying the confidence and favour of Louis XIV, and rejoicing in the good fortune of his country to possess so staunch a defender of Catholicism and absolutism. His mind was not drawn to the study of political science by any suspicion that his researches might add to the perfection of his royal patron. It is difficult to suppose that he applied himself voluntarily and spontaneously to a field of speculation for which neither his talents nor his position as a Churchman gave him particular qualification. But the genesis of his political writings is to be found in the combination of two circumstances: first, his appointment as tutor to the Dauphin, and, secondly, the influence of his controversial writings against the Protestants. In the latter respect Bossuet had been a valiant *malleus hæreticorum*, exposing the weakness of the Protestant position and delivering an aggressive assault upon its defences. This contest led him insensibly across the thin borderline which divided the field of theological argument from that of political speculation. At the same time his responsibility for the education of the Dauphin caused him to turn attention to political questions, an understanding of which was of especial importance to one whose relationship to the monarchy was so close. The responsibility which rested upon Bossuet in this regard was, indeed, of the most serious character. It is of the essence of absolutism that the Absolute Monarch himself should have been trained to form a right judgment of situations and of men. Accordingly Bossuet's appointment in 1670 as tutor of the Dauphin laid upon him the obligation to familiarise himself with problems of political societies in order to discharge the duties of supervisor. For such investigation there were not lacking precedents of the highest eminence, from that of Aristotle, who had been the preceptor of Alexander the Great, to Erasmus, who had laid down a pattern of kingly government for Henry VIII in *The Institution of a Christian Prince*.

Bossuet's period of tutorship to the Dauphin was particularly fruitful in literary composition. It embraced his

Discours sur l'histoire universelle, *Le Traité de la connaissance de Dieu et de soi-même*, *Le Traité du libre arbitre*, *La Logique*, and finally *La Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte*. This last and latest of Bossuet's works was the crown of his writings for the edification of his royal pupil, and was regarded by himself as the consummation of his literary production. Not, indeed, that he found a sufficient reward for his efforts in the intellectual development of his pupil, for the Dauphin was by no means particularly gifted or diligent. Upon occasion he was the reverse, showing a distinct aversion to study, but the public importance of his education compensated for his personal shortcomings and stimulated Bossuet to a remarkable fecundity of composition. Of the ten books which constitute the finished scheme of *La Politique* only six were actually written for and perused by the Dauphin. The completion of the work was undertaken by Bossuet in response to the repeated exhortations of friends who importuned him to perfect a work of such solid proportions. Even so, an interval of thirty years elapsed before the last books were composed, for, whereas the first six had been written during the years 1667–68, Bossuet did not take up the task again until 1700, so that death came upon him in April 1704, with the conclusion to the final book still unfinished.

If the inception of the work was inspired by the responsibilities of tutorship, its completion was due to other causes, not least amongst which was the duty of combating Protestant principles in their application to political questions no less than in their theological aspect. In this regard the actual conditions of contemporary Europe furnished a powerful motive for the exposition of a Catholic scheme of political philosophy. France itself, the kingdom over which Louis XIV now ruled, had but recently been delivered from the anarchy of the Fronde; it had twice given shelter to the exiled royal family of England, receiving the defeated Royalists of the Civil War and affording asylum to the dispossessed James II; but at the same time as it offered hospitality to the family of Charles I its government had been compelled to acknowledge and ally with the regicide Cromwell. Further, England in the seventeenth century

was generally regarded as the head of the Protestant interest in Europe, the more especially when it chose as its elected monarch the chief enemy of Louis XIV, William of Orange. Not without reason did Bossuet see in contemporary English political events only the practical expression of the principles underlying Protestant opposition to divinely constituted authority. The religion which had begun by rebellion against the divine supremacy of the Papacy continued logically to overthrow the power of the civil sovereign. Such a religion, in the opinion of Bossuet, could have nothing in common with primitive Christianity, which inculcated the obligation of obedience to the powers that be, requiring its converts to submit patiently and resignedly even to the persecution of pagan emperors.

> For this reason it is an evil tendency and a most detestable consequence of the Reformation to have raised up subjects against their princes and their country, thus filling the whole world with civil strife; even more detestable is it and evil to have done this as a matter of principle and to have laid down seditious maxims, which work for the subversion of all empires and the overthrow of all the powers established by God. . . . Nothing could be more opposed to primitive Christianity than this Reformed Christianity, which has made and still makes rebellion to be a principle of religion, whereas the former regarded obedience and fidelity as fundamentals of its faith.[1]

To pursue the Protestant heresy to its source it was necessary to demonstrate that the Bible, the final court of appeal of all Protestant writers, gave no countenance whatsoever to the doctrine of rebellion of subjects against their princes, but rather enunciated the contrary precept of unlimited obedience. Bossuet accordingly essayed the task of constructing a political philosophy, based mainly upon citations and examples from Scripture, which would constitute a convincing refutation of the errors of Protestantism and a defence of the principles of Catholicism. The investigation of the question of the nature and grounds of the obedience which subjects owed to their sovereigns, undertaken by the protagonist of Catholicism against its opponents, and intended for the instruction of the Dauphin, could not

[1] Bossuet, *Cinquième Avertissement aux protestants*, I; *Œuvres choisies de Bossuet*, tome xix, pp. 229–230 (Soissons, 1827).

fail to achieve a result serviceable to this twofold objective. Notwithstanding the unimpeachable political loyalty of the Bishop of Meaux, however, the publication of *La Politique*, carried out by the Abbé Bossuet after the death of his uncle, was only secured in the face of the greatest difficulties. So many were the obstacles encountered in procuring official permission to publish that the Chancellor's privilege was not granted until December 1707, and the practical difficulties of actual printing not overcome until 1709, when the work at last appeared. The character of a treatise on political philosophy composed in the atmosphere of the Court of Versailles and subjected to so severe a scrutiny by the most sensitive censorship could not be in doubt. The courtiers of Louis XIV were required to utter sentiments only of adulation and loyalty, and the divines to prophesy smooth things before *le Roi Soleil.*

II

The education of Bossuet had been of a character well calculated to fit him for the literary tasks to which he devoted his genius. He was born on September 27, 1627, of a family of prosperous Burgundian lawyers, his father being then a judge of the Parlement of Dijon. He received his first formal education at the hands of the Jesuits in Dijon until he was sent, in 1642, to the Collège de Navarre in Paris to study theology. The direction of his career and the study of theology to which he was henceforth destined had been the work of his mother, who encouraged him to aspire to the vocation of the priesthood. In Paris he achieved a great reputation for industry and eloquence, receiving the nickname of *Bos suetus aratro*[1] for his assiduity as a student. In 1652 he took his degree with distinction in divinity, and was admitted into priest's orders. He then left Paris for Metz, where his father was now a judge of the Parlement, and of the cathedral-church of which city he had himself been a canon since 1640, assuming the office of archdeacon upon his taking up residence there. The number of Protestants living in Metz stimulated Bossuet at once to active prose-

[1] "An ox well broken to the plough."

lytism, from which sprang the beginning of his controversial writings and the cultivation of his oratorical gifts. In 1659 he returned to Paris, being appointed in 1662 preacher at the Royal Chapel. Here he laid the foundations of his reputation as a preacher and achieved his greatest triumphs as a master of oratory. He excelled in the delivery of *oraisons funèbres*, a type of composition which afforded a wide field for the industry and exposition of the preacher. His funeral orations upon the deaths of Henrietta Maria, widow of Charles I, in 1669, of her daughter Henrietta, Duchess of Orleans, in the following year, and of Condé in 1687 are among his finest literary productions. Within a decade of his establishment in Paris he was appointed to the bishopric of Condom, in Gascony, but resigned the see within a year upon accepting, in 1670, the office of tutor to the Dauphin, then a boy of nine years.

The period of his tutorship, which continued until the Dauphin married a Bavarian princess at the age of sixteen, has been remarked already as a time of great literary fecundity, to which belongs the composition of the chief of his theological and political writings. After relinquishing this position Bossuet was appointed, in 1681, to the bishopric of Meaux. Almost immediately he became involved in the famous Gallican controversy, from which he would fain have stood aloof. Harassed by the demands of Louis XIV and by his loyalty to the Papacy, he endeavoured to steer a middle course betwixt the Scylla and Charybdis of ' Aye ' and ' No.' Forced to adopt the side upon which the king stood, he secured permission to draft himself the Gallican oath to be taken by the clergy, which he executed with all possible moderation. Pressed farther to support the royal action, he composed his *Defensio Cleri Gallicani*, which was not published until after his death.

Bossuet's share in the Gallican controversy was the least happy of his controversial activities, for the attitude of *le Grand Monarque* towards the Apostolic See was singularly lacking in respect and moderation. Freed from the irksome obligation to pursue this subject farther, the Bishop turned again to his writings against the Protestants. In 1671 he had published an *Exposition de la foi catholique*, designed to

further the conversion of Protestants, and therefore of a very moderate tone. So conciliatory and persuasive was this defence of Catholicism that its first edition lacked the chapters on the Eucharist, Tradition and the Authority of the Church and Papacy, which appeared in the second edition. The future English Primate, Dr William Wake, then resident in Paris as chaplain to Lord Preston, the English Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Louis XIV, securing a copy of the first impression, entered into controversy with the author concerning the relative positions of the Churches of England and of Rome. In 1688 appeared the chief of Bossuet's writings against Protestants, the *Histoire des variations des églises protestantes*, in which he urged that unity was essential to the Church, and that the spectacle of the infinite divisions of the Protestant sects was itself a witness of their error and a potent argument for Catholicism. From the controversy with Protestants the Bishop passed to a protracted correspondence with Leibnitz concerning the possibility of reunion, a discussion conducted with great ability on both sides, but inevitably without result, since the fixity which was to Bossuet an essential characteristic of true religion was counted an undesirable thing by Leibnitz. The later disputes in which Bossuet was involved, his contests on behalf of the scholastic theology against the Oratorians, Simon and Malebranche, did not display either his intellectual or moral qualities at their best. His vigour and urbanity were both declining, and the day of his triumphs was nearly past. He died on April 12, 1704, two years after the outbreak of the War of the Grand Alliance against Louis XIV, and in the year which was to witness Marlborough's victory at Blenheim. He had seen and approved the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the culminating measure of the absolutism of Louis XIV; he believed himself to have delivered the *coup de grâce* to the Protestant schism by his exposition of its absurdities in his *Histoire des variations*; he had defended the authority and autocracy of kings, showing the divine sanction and prescription of their power; and he died as little conscious of the coming fall of the French monarchy, or of the formal abjuration of Catholicism by the Revolutionaries who set up the cult of the Goddess of Reason,

as of the more immediate establishment of Protestantism in England and Holland by the victory of the Allies against the Grand Sovereign of France.

III

The consideration of Bossuet's political ideas may be approached through the study of his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, and of the *Cinquième Avertissement contre les lettres du ministre Jurieu*, to the final statement of his principles in *La Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte*. In the first of these works Bossuet surveyed in brief the main tendencies of universal history in order to instruct his royal pupil in the events of past empires and to prepare his mind for the process of philosophic interpretation. The volume is remarkable both for its positive characteristics and for its omissions. Bossuet attempted to trace the relation of cause and effect in the fortunes of kingdoms, and thus to lay down the principles of a philosophy of history. Yet the essay is singularly defective in scope and outlook. For its author the Mediterranean Sea was the veritable centre of human history. Of Mohammed and of the history of the East nothing is said. Even the story of Greece and of Rome is told as part only of the *præparatio evangelica*. Israel is more important than Italy, for the proud Empire of Rome was but the framework fashioned to receive the universal Catholic Church. In the *Cinquième Avertissement* Bossuet defended the thesis of his *Histoire des variations* against Protestant objections and reaffirmed his conclusion that political and religious societies must depend the one upon the other, so that the divine autocracy of Pope and sovereign alone guarantee the stability and soundness of Church and State.

It was in the *Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte*, however, that Bossuet gave the fullest exposition of his principles, and to it chief attention must be directed. Its title implied an attitude towards the Bible which would have been impossible in the succeeding century of deistic and rationalist criticism. The ambitious attempt to fashion an immutable form of political organisation upon the basis of Scriptural precedent and authority rested itself upon the uncritical assumption that

the constitution achieved by the Jewish nation was the most perfect possible to human societies and prescribed by the special decree of Providence. Just as in metaphysical studies an Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam, so the political speculations of the ancient Greeks and Romans were the imagination of human fallibility when compared with the divinely ordained constitution of the Hebrews. Bossuet, indeed, went so far as to invoke the authority of the Holy Spirit to confirm the precepts of pagan writers. Thus he declared that "it is not only Homer who calls princes the pastors of their people, but the Holy Spirit does so";[1] and that "Aristotle has affirmed this point, but the Holy Spirit has declared it with greater force."[2] So direct and detailed was the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the composition of the Bible as to fix upon this Divine source the dictation of the most minute ceremonial splendour of Solomon. Arguing in favour of the magnificence of a regal court, Bossuet gave as example the riches of Solomon:

> This king was served from vessels of gold; all the vases of the house were of fine gold; and the Holy Spirit disdained not to enter into such details, because they served, in that period of peace, to arouse admiration and fear, both within and without the kingdom, of the power of so magnificent a king.[3]

This search for exact rules and precedents of Jewish kings to justify the policy and panoply of Louis XIV was evidently incongruous in view of the manifest absurdity of the supposition that the political activities of the petty rulers even of the united Jewish kingdom could form the inviolable pattern for all future sovereigns. Even the splendours of Solomon in all his glory fell far short of the ceremonial of *le Roi Soleil*.

There was a further difficulty, however, which attended the endeavour to construct a polity on the basis of Scriptural quotations. The Bible itself is a library of books, not the product of a single hand; even the historical books of the Old Testament alone present a series of pictures of the Hebrews at various stages of their development, passing

[1] Bossuet, *La Politique*, Liv. III, Art. 3, Prop. III, p. 75, in *Œuvres choisies de Bossuet*, tome xxii.

[2] *Ibid.*, Prop. V, p. 79.

[3] *Ibid.*, Liv. X, Art. 1, Prop. I, p. 419.

from the early tribal government, through the creation of a united kingdom, and the break up of that unity into the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah, to the culminating theocracy of the post-exilic Jewish society. This variety of organisation is matched by a diversity of outlook on the part of the several writers, some of whom regard the entire process of monarchical government as a direct apostasy from the theocracy which was the divinely ordained polity of the Hebrews. It is plain, therefore, that the reader of the Bible needs some guide to interpret to him the meaning of its manifold evidence. The question of the Ethiopian eunuch, "How can I understand except some one shall guide me?" was not less true of the investigation of the Bishop of Meaux. The very circumstance that the Protestants found in the Bible sanction for their doctrine of popular sovereignty, whilst the Catholic prelate read there a clear prescription of monarchy, suggested that the presuppositions with which each party approached the sacred text would determine and explain the particular conclusions reached. This was certainly true of Bossuet, who approached the Scriptures with the absolutism of Louis XIV as his model and standard of interpretation. To have drawn from them a scheme of oligarchy or democracy would have been foreign to the purpose with which he undertook the study, and would have served ill for the education of the Dauphin. *La Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte* is a piece of apologetic, not of scientific investigation. In it Bossuet set out to demonstrate the validity of a conclusion already determined, not to build an impartial scheme of politics.

To a precritical age, which sought for the principles and purpose of human society in the study of its origins, the problem of the beginnings of social life was of primary importance. Bossuet found both a theoretical and practical necessity for society revealed in the Bible. Its theoretical basis lay in the status of men as sons of the one Father, and therefore brethren to each other. This axiom was enunciated by Christ in his proclamation of the two great commandments, and had its roots in the common descent of all mankind from the first human pair in the Garden of Eden. By divine creation, as well as by physical generation, all men

were brethren. "Thus the character of brotherhood is realised in the human race, and men, who have all one Father, ought to love each other as brethren." [1] To this theoretical basis of society there was added a practical, arising from the circumstances that men have differing talents, for the exercise of which an ordered social life is essential. Society was therefore based both upon divine precept and upon common interest.

> God, wishing to establish society, intended each individual to find in it his good, and to continue attached to it by interest. Accordingly He gave differing abilities to men, one man excelling in one thing, another in another, so that they might assist each other as members of the body and their union might be strengthened by their mutual needs.[2]

Upon this twin foundation human society was securely planted. "Thus we see human society to rest upon unshakable foundations; one God, one common object and end, a common origin and blood, a common interest and need, as well in the practical affairs as in the culture of life." [3] If the objection were made that the very division of mankind into differing races and peoples implied a break-up of the original unity, Bossuet replied by a direct negative, urging that the division was intended rather to prevent confusion and conflict by assigning to each nation its territory and the bounds within which its life should be fulfilled. Accordingly the virtue of patriotism was not a contradiction but a reflection of the universal brotherhood of man, since the obligation to love one's neighbour applied with particular force to one's fellow-citizens, who shared the possession of the same language and soil.

> Thus human society requires men to love the land which they occupy together, regarding it as a mother and a nurse, attaching themselves to it and finding in it a bond of union. It was this virtue which the Romans called "caritas patrii soli," "love of one's fatherland," and which they regarded as a bond between men.[4]

It was not the national patriotism of men, therefore, which created divisions amongst them; ideally they might have

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. I, Art. 1, Prop. III, p. 6.
[2] *Ibid.*, Prop. VI, p. 8
[3] *Ibid.*, Prop. VI, p. 9.
[4] *Ibid.*, Art. 2, Prop. III, p. 14.

lived in amity and with a fraternal consciousness of their essential unity. The circumstance which bred strife and dissension was the infection of the entire human race caused by the sin of its first parents. From the rebellion of Adam and Eve resulted all the crimes, evils, and seditions which had marred the promise of human society from the murder of Abel by Cain to that of Charles I of England by his subjects. Hence the dual strand in human nature, its essential virtue and sociability combined with its cruelty and disharmony.

> Thus human society, though founded upon such sacred ties, is broken by the evil passions [of men], and, as St Augustine said, "No creature is more sociable than Man according to his nature, none more intractable and insociable by his corruption."[1]

But the Fall of Man, which vitiated his potential goodness, occurred at the very outset of human history, thus poisoning the springs of all future societies. The State of Nature, owing to this Fall, was one of conflict and war, instead of peace and order, so that the institution of a settled government became essential to enforce public peace and to suppress the evil which had created confusion and chaos. "Men, having become intractable by the violence of their passions and unsociable by their differing desires, could only be united by submission to a government which would control all."[2] Nor could the desired end of peace be attained by any other submission than one without reserve or qualification. Men must surrender the whole of their power to the sovereign magistrate in order to ensure safety and protection, and to escape from the State of Nature. Unless the sovereign possessed full authority he could not preserve each individual from oppression nor the community from anarchy.

> The sovereign magistrate exercises all the force of the people which has consented to obey him. All their force is given to him, each individual giving power to the magistrate to the prejudice of his own power, and surrendering his own life in case of disobedience. The individual gains thereby, for he secures in the person of the supreme governor more power than he has renounced, since the

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. I, Art. 2, Prop. I, p. 12.
[2] *Ibid.*, Art. 3, Prop. I, p. 16.

whole force of the people is now at his service. Thus the individual is safe against oppression and violence, because he has an invincible defender in the person of the prince, who wields incomparably greater power than the persons who seek to attack him. . . . Under a legitimate government each individual becomes strong by placing all power in the hands of the magistrate, whose interest it is to keep the peace in order to maintain his own position.[1]

Bossuet, like Hobbes, required the unlimited surrender of natural rights on the part of all individuals in order to constitute a sovereign power; and in accordance with this principle, again following the English champion of absolutism, he recognised that such institution might proceed either from consent or conquest. Of the latter circumstance history could furnish many examples, more especially the Hebrew conquest of the Promised Land. But although the right of conquest was fully recognised, Bossuet argued that it passed imperceptibly into the condition of sovereignty by consent when the conquered people, in the course of one or two generations, tacitly reconciled themselves to the rule of the victor, whose dominion was henceforth maintained in peace. But except in name the institution of sovereignty by conquest differed little from that by consent. Indeed, the latter could be called more fitly institution by compulsion; for whereas in conditions of conquest the coercion was external, in the circumstance of 'consent' the people were compelled to institute a sovereign power by the terrors and perils of anarchy. To escape from the State of Nature they must create a supreme authority.

When the famous principle "salus populi suprema lex" is brought forward I acknowledge its force. But the people has found its safety in the disposition of all power in the hands of a single person, and consequently has no authority against him to whom all power has been given. It is not that the disadvantages of the complete independence of the prince are not realised, for there have been many evil kings and intolerable tyrants; but it is far less inconvenient to suffer princes, however bad, than to give the least power to the people.[2]

The notion of popular sovereignty was simply a fiction. In instituting a sovereign power the people made no compact

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. I, Art. 3, Prop. V, p. 20.
[2] *Cinquième Avertissement*, xlviii, p. 322, *op. cit.*

with the prince whereby they could reserve to themselves an ultimate sovereignty or impose any limits upon his power. Bossuet poured ridicule upon the idea of such pacts, declaring that not only had their originals perished long ago, but no copies of any agreement could be produced. Nor would he allow the idea that the people originally possessed sovereign power, which they had at one time bestowed upon whom they would.

> This is an error of principle and a confusion of terms. For if we consider men in the State of Nature, and before the institution of government, we find mere anarchy—that is to say, a fierce and uncontrolled individual freedom, in which each person aspires to and contends for everything, each is continually on his guard and therefore in a state of continuous war against his neighbours. This is a condition in which reason is powerless, because every one follows his dominant passion, as if that were reason, in which even the law of nature is powerless, because reason is without power, so that there is neither prosperity, nor possession, nor civilisation, nor assured peace, nor, to speak truly, any right save that of the stronger. . . . To imagine that a people living in this state possess sovereignty, which is already a kind of government, is to talk of a government before any government exists, which is self-contradictory. Far from the people being sovereign in this condition, as yet there is no such entity as a people. There may be families, albeit ill-controlled and ill-protected; there may even be a tribe, a collection of persons, a confused multitude, but there cannot be a people, since the existence of a people presupposes already some bond of unity, some settled behaviour, and some established law; which things cannot exist until the multitude have begun to escape from this unhappy state of anarchy. It is true that from this anarchy all the kinds of human government, monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, and other forms, have emerged; and this is what is meant when it is said that all kinds of magistracies and legitimate authorities have arisen originally from the multitude or the people. But it is wrong to infer that the people, acting as a sovereign power, had distributed their powers to each form of government, because, in order to do this, there must have been already a sovereign power or a governed society, which we have seen not to be the case. It is further erroneous to suppose that sovereignty or public authority is a thing already existent which the multitude must possess in order to bestow. On the contrary, it is created by and results from the surrender by individuals of the right which has resulted in confusion, and the liberty which has caused every man to fear his neighbour, in

> favour of a settled government. If it pleases anyone to call that intractable freedom which is surrendered to the law and the magistrate by the name of sovereignty it is permissible to do so; but this makes for confusion, for it confuses the independence of every man in a condition of anarchy with sovereignty.[1]

The correspondence between Bossuet and Hobbes in their conception of the State of Nature, of the means of escape from its anarchy, and of the unlimited character of the sovereignty thus created, is close. Both writers found it necessary to deny entirely the notion of ultimate popular sovereignty in order to build up the fabric of absolutism. But Bossuet had to proceed a step farther than the English philosopher, and to establish the divine prescription of monarchy as superior to all other forms of political constitution. The principles of Hobbes could be satisfied by any polity which concentrated sovereignty in the hands of one authority, whether king or council or democratic assembly, whereas the apologist of Louis XIV had to demonstrate the particular virtues of monarchical government which entitled it to a position of supremacy over its competitors. In attempting this task Bossuet was inconsistent and unconvincing. Throughout his argument he endeavoured to balance two contradictory tendencies; for, whilst he could demonstrate upon grounds of abstract reasoning that monarchy was the form of human government which had the closest correspondence with the Divine Nature, his historical knowledge compelled the admission that over a large portion of the inhabited world other forms of polity had prevailed and still survived.

Reasoning from first principles, Bossuet deduced from the monarchy of God the paternal monarchy of Adam. God Himself, being the sole Ruler of the universe and being a Unity, bestowed upon the first man, Adam, sovereignty over all his seed. With the growth in numbers of the human race, the possibility of a single universal monarchy disappeared, being replaced by the reproduction of the original kingship of Adam in the petty princedoms of the various scattered human societies.[2] Accordingly it was legitimate to urge that monarchy was the oldest, the most widespread, and the most natural

[1] *Cinquième Avertissement*, l, pp. 326–327, *op. cit.*
[2] *La Politique*, Liv. II, Art. 1, *passim*.

form of government; and therefore that of the various possible types of monarchy, the hereditary kind, in which the sovereignty descended by primogeniture, was the most convenient for practical purposes. This conclusion, however, did not conflict with the full recognition of the circumstance that God had permitted other forms of polity to flourish among the nations of the earth; and if God had permitted He must have legitimised such alternative forms, for Bossuet insisted always that the first duty of citizenship was the obligation to render unqualified obedience to the established government. It would appear necessary in such case to consider the comparative merits and demerits of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy, in order to construct the best polity for contemporary France. Such a duty was either unperceived or disregarded by Bossuet. The discussion of the relative virtues of divers forms of government was entirely foreign to his purpose. He turned aside from contemplation of this question, affirming only the two principles of the legitimacy of all established governments and of the superior sanctions possessed by monarchy.

> We have seen that, by order of the Divine Providence, the monarchical constitution was in its origin the most conformable to the will of God, as declared by the Scriptures We have not overlooked therein the fact that other forms of government flourished in antiquity, of which God gave no special command to the human race, so that each people ought to accept as divinely ordained the form of government established in its country; for God is a God of peace, Who desires the tranquillity of human concerns. But since we write in a monarchical state, and for a prince destined to succeed to so great a kingdom, we shall apply henceforth all our precepts from Scripture to that kind of government under which we ourselves live.[1]

IV

The third book of *La Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte* opens with the explanation " où l'on commence à expliquer la nature et les propriétés de l'autorité royale " ; and the subject thus initiated forms the single theme of the last seven of the ten books of Bossuet's work. Having disposed of the

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. II, Art. 2, Conclusion, pp. 64–65, *op. cit.*

questions of the origins of human societies and their institution of a sovereign power, and having turned aside from the temptation to consider the various forms of polity thus evolved, the Bishop embarked upon a detailed and circumstantial discussion of the rights of the monarch and of the duties of his subjects in relation to his authority. One of the most important questions in this connexion was that of the attitude of the king towards private property. It could be argued on abstract grounds that the monarch need pay no respect to the principle of the inviolability of private property, but that all enjoyment of such property was subject to the will of the prince. On the other hand, the defender of constitutional monarchy might urge that the right to private property was a natural right which the sovereign authority must recognise, but could not abolish. For Bossuet the pregnant example of Naboth's vineyard prevented any suggestion on his part that the king could deal with his subjects according to that evil precedent; but he turned the sharpness of its judgment by the skilful contention that the only title to individual property was that conferred by the public government.

> Take away the government, and the land and all its resources become as much common to all men as are the air and the light of the sun. . . . According to the primitive law of nature, no person has an individual right to anything, since all things are contended for by all persons. In a settled government no person has the right to take possession of anything. . . . It is from the distribution made by the sovereign magistrate that the right of property arises; and in general all right derives from the public government.[1]

To illustrate this Bossuet quoted the example of the partition of the land of Canaan by Joshua, who thereby created the title to private possession. Accordingly the right of private property was a positive, not a natural, right; and by a logical inference its continuance lay in the power of the government itself. In theory the monarch was the source of all rights, and individual rights were but a delegation from him. An extreme case of this principle could be found in the condition of slavery. The existence of slavery as a possible condition was implied in the recognition of sovereignty by conquest;

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. I, Art. 3, Prop. IV, pp. 18–19.

from the New Testament itself texts could be quoted which implied at least an allowance of slaves, and Bossuet admitted not only the existence of slavery, but the authority of the monarch to transfer to another his rights over the persons as well as the property of his subjects.

> For since a whole people may be conquered and thereby compelled to unconditional surrender, thus that whole people may be enslaved; and in such a manner that its master is able to dispose of it as his own property, by bestowing it upon another person without asking its consent.[1]

There could be little doubt of the attitude of a sovereign whose decree was the foundation of private property and who claimed the power to transfer his slaves to the domination of another ruler to the problem of intellectual freedom, particularly freedom of conscience. Of the importance of religious sanctions to the State Bossuet was well aware. He insisted not only that religion was essential to the stability of the State, being itself the parent of the virtues which constitute good citizenship, but also that the prince himself should set an example of sober devotion to its precepts. The sovereign should be both an ensample of piety and a protector of the servants of religion. But with Bossuet true religion was synonymous with Catholicism. His king, therefore, must be the defender of Catholicism, and, as such, must suppress all heretical forms of Christianity, realising that Protestantism was alike the seed and the fruit of a spirit of rebellion.

> Those who would deny to the king the use of force in matters of religion, because religion ought to be free, fall into an impious error. Otherwise it would be necessary to tolerate, amongst all the subjects of any state, idolatry, Mohammedanism, Judaism, and every kind of false religion, even blasphemy and atheism; and thus the worst crimes would go the most unpunished.[2]

The strictness of this contention was somewhat modified by Bossuet's admission that " it is only in extreme circumstances that severe measures should be employed, more particularly measures of the greatest severity " ; but in view of the principle thus stated it was natural that the writer should not only

[1] *Cinquième Avertissement*, li, p. 330, *op. cit.*
[2] *La Politique*, Liv. VII, Art. 3, Prop. X, p. 249.

approve, but commend as a meritorious action, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV.

The restriction of individual freedom, however, did not proceed from the resolve of the sovereign to require from his subjects a corresponding paucity of duties. If the citizen had few rights, he had many responsibilities. The absolutist state demanded the entire subordination of individuals to its welfare, and Bossuet considered unity and uniformity to be the marks of a well-ordered administration.

> "All Israel went out as one man; they numbered forty thousand men, and this entire multitude was as one man!" Such is the unity of a people when each man, renouncing his individual will, transfers and unites it to that of the prince and of the ruler. Apart from this there is no union, and the people wander as vagabonds or as a scattered herd.[1]

This austere standard of unity could be achieved only by inculcating the duty of unquestioning and unlimited obedience upon the subjects. Of the necessity of instant obedience Bossuet was convinced.

> If the prince is not obeyed punctually public order is undermined, and as a result there is no more order, harmony, or peace in a state. . . . God has appointed kings and princes His lieutenants on earth in order to make their authority sacred and inviolable. . . . There is no principle better founded upon the Word of God than that obedience is due to legitimate authority according to the precepts of religion and conscience.[2]

Nor was this obedience limited by any conditions. If the right of rebellion on the part of the people against an unjust ruler were allowed there could be no protection against the conversion of the state into a shambles of civil strife.

> Even pagans, by the light of natural reason, realised the need to suffer the violence of evil rulers in the hope of better successors, to support them, however unjust, hoping for calmer weather after the storms, and reflecting that Providence, which does not desire the ruin of either human race or of nature, will not allow a people to be oppressed for ever by an evil government, nor the world to be shaken by an increasing tempest.[3]

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. I, Art. 3, Prop. III, p. 18.
[2] *Ibid.*, Liv. VI, Art. 2, Prop. I, pp. 208–209.
[3] *Cinquième Avertissement*, xxxi, p. 295.

To this rule of unswerving and unconditional obedience Bossuet allowed one solitary objection. Resistance was lawful, and even obligatory if the sovereign should command anything contrary to the law of God. Even so, he did not pause to elaborate or illustrate the point, but contented himself with a statement of the apostolic affirmation that "we ought to obey God rather than men."[1] Apart from this single authorisation of revolt, the subjects depended for justice upon the piety and self-interest of the king. Ideally the sovereign would do justice because his office was a reflection of the monarchy of God, to Whom he would have to render account of his stewardship. Practically also the natural interest of the ruler would be the creation of a wealthy, prosperous, and contented people. Such a kingdom would add to his own revenues and strength, whereas the reverse would diminish his magnificence and glory. "In the multitude of people is the king's glory; but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince." Accordingly self-interest would move kings to rule justly.

Notwithstanding, the actual history of mankind proved that the tyranny of evil kings had provoked rebellion. The Old Testament itself, and especially the Apocryphal books of the Maccabees, furnished examples of rebellion allowed by God. The force of such examples Bossuet was compelled to admit, but he argued that God's allowance of rebellion did not mean that He approved the principle of popular resistance. "Such a spirit of revolt is sent by God when He is purposed to overthrow kingdoms. Without approving rebellions God nevertheless allows them, punishing crimes by other crimes which He also punishes in their time."[2] A people should not be encouraged to revolt by the fact that God allowed rebellions; they should rather consider that rebellion was the beginning of a conflagration which might destroy both nation and ruler together. God often punished the sins of the king by a visitation which involved the ruin of the subjects also.

> If the restless people rebel, refusing to continue peaceably under the authority of the sovereign, the fire of disunion is kindled in the state, and consumes the bramble together with the other trees—that is,

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. VI, Art. 2, Prop. II, p. 210.
[2] *Ibid.*, Liv. VII, Art. 6, Prop. II, p. 299.

the king and the people; the cedars of Lebanon will be burned; for with the fall of the supreme power, that of the sovereign, all lesser powers are overthrown also and the whole state becomes but a cinder.[1]

The authority of the sovereign was in the scheme of Bossuet the basis of the welfare of the State. Into his hands were concentrated all actions of authority, whether legislative, administrative, or judicial.

To the king alone belongs the authority to command and likewise coercive power. To him alone belongs the general conservation of the people; this is the first principle and the basis of all others—such as, that to the king appertain all public affairs, all decrees and ordinances, and all marks of distinction. There is no authority which is independent of his, no assembly that can meet without his command. Thus for the good of the State all its power is centred in one person. To allow a rival authority to exist is to divide the State and to destroy the public peace by setting up two masters.[2]

The sovereign, considered thus, was no longer merely an individual; he became a corporate and representative person, expressing the purpose and character of the State.

The prince, considered as prince, must not be regarded as a private individual; he is a public person, in whom consists all the State, and whose will constitutes the will of the entire people. As all perfection and all virtue are united in God, so all the power of individual citizens is united in the person of the prince. . . . The power of God is felt from one end of the earth to the other in a single moment; similarly the royal authority penetrates into all parts of the kingdom. The power of the sovereign holds the entire State in being, as God sustains the whole universe. If God withdrew His hand the universe would fall into annihilation. So if the authority of the king ceased in the kingdom all things would fall into confusion. . . . Behold an entire nation united in the person of a single ruler; consider this sacred, paternal, and absolute authority; behold the hidden counsel which governs the entire body of the State, residing in one single head. Thus the image of God may be seen in kings and the idea of their royal majesty.[3]

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. IV, Art. 1, Prop. V, p. 102. The reference is to the parable of the trees which chose one of themselves as king, in Judges ix.

[2] *Ibid.*, Prop. V, pp. 98–100.

[3] *Ibid.*, Art. 4, Prop. I, pp. 192–194.

Such exaltation of the dignity of kingship removes its subjects from the plane of individual comparison or criticism. In a very real sense, whether Louis XIV ever uttered the phrase or not, the axiom " L'état, c'est moi " was true of his regal position. For Bossuet the service of the State was the service of the king, and no distinction could be made between them. To profess to serve the State apart from or contrary to the will of the king was to sow the seeds of disunity and rebellion.

> Those who think to serve the State otherwise than by serving the king and in obedience to him ascribe to themselves a part of the royal authority; further, they disturb the peace of the kingdom and the harmony of the members with the head.[1]

For the individual citizen, therefore, reverence or duty to the sovereign was of the essence of devotion to the State.

> A good subject will love his king as he does the public good, or the welfare of the State, or the air which he breathes, or the light of his eyes, or even his own life; he will love the king even more than his own life.[2]

Loyal subjects who thus regarded the person of their ruler would count no honour, nor title, nor veneration too exalted for him who, under God, was the author of all their happiness and prosperity.

On the other hand, the sovereign who occupied so dignified a position was invested with corresponding responsibility. No writer could enunciate more clearly than Bossuet the doctrine that the monarch must rule for the good of his people. The very circumstances which exalted the regal office, its correspondence with the authority of God, its exercise of divine power by delegation, and its descent from the paternal government of Adam, gave to it a more solemn obligation and duty.

> The power of kings being from above, they ought not to suppose that they are possessed of it in order to use it according to their own pleasure. On the contrary, they ought to exercise it with fear and restraint, as a gift from God for which He will exact an account. . . .

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. VI, Art. 1, Prop. II, p. 201.
[2] *Ibid.*, Prop. V, p. 205.

> Kings, therefore, should tremble in using the power granted to them by God, and should consider how terrible a sacrilege it is to abuse a power which is granted by God. . . . What profanation and what audacity on the part of evil kings to sit upon the throne of God, and yet to promulgate laws contrary to His laws, and to use the sword which He has put into their hands to commit violence and outrage upon His children! [1]

The importance of the office of sovereign over a nation was so evident as to require the most careful and rigorous discipline of mind and spirit from the prince who aspired to succeed to a kingdom. The foundation of such training consisted of the eradication of the vices of private character, especially those of weakness, irresolution, and unwise obstinacy. The prince must be fervent in business, concerned to achieve the entire mastery of himself, understanding that his purpose should not be distracted by passion or caprice; he must cultivate a careful and judicious knowledge of men, observing the events of his time and the reactions of people towards them. The discipline of his studies was not that of the cloister, but of the world of affairs.

> The prince must not be conceived as holding a book in his hand, with contracted brows and eyes fixedly regarding what is written therein. His chief book is the world, and his study is to be attentive to the events which happen around him, in order to profit by them.[2]

Above all, the prince should cultivate a true piety, the very bond of peace and of all virtues. He should distinguish and avoid a false and counterfeit pietism, whilst learning to place a constant reliance upon the true God, Who is the Author of wisdom. Therefore he should be religious, not superstitious; not speaking of Fate, nor having recourse to magic or divination, but realising that all things are governed and ordered by God, Who upholds the counsels of pious kings with His own wisdom.

> In vain do men deliberate in their hearts all their projects and speeches. The occasion bears always an element of the unexpected, so that they do or say either more or less than they had intended. But this element in their intended actions and projects which is unknown to men is the secret occasion by which God acts. . . . Accordingly,

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. III, Art. 2, Prop. IV, pp. 71–72.
[2] *Ibid.*, Liv. V, Art. 1, Prop. VIII, pp. 133–134.

since the office of the king is very high, so much the more does it surpass the weakness of a man, so much greater is the action of God, to whom the king ought to have recourse and to surrender himself to His counsels.[1]

The fruit of reliance upon the divine wisdom will be seen in one especial virtue, the unwavering fidelity of the king to his promises. This fidelity is the basis of that mutual confidence between sovereign and subjects upon which the welfare of the State more especially rests.

Kings who are false to their oaths (and may God forbid that they should ever be!) destroy, so far as lies within their power, the strongest bond between men, and in so doing undermine society and the peace of mankind.[2]

Furnished with the virtues of Christian character, and observant of the public affairs of his age, the prince might then approach the practical duties of government and administration. Chief amongst the obligations of kingship was the careful preparation for the defence of the nation, a duty which raised at once the question of the lawfulness of aggressive war. The prospect of Louis XIV's unceasing aggression gave to Bossuet's discussion of warfare an element of peril. The examples of warlike activity on the part of the kings of the Old Testament furnished too many precedents, indeed, for the Bishop to adopt a pacificist attitude. Nevertheless, he drew a fine distinction between the various motives of war. He condemned as unjustifiable the waging of war for purely ambitious ends, for love of military glory, for the acquisition of plunder, or for the satisfaction of feelings of envy or jealousy. On the other hand, kings were obliged to have recourse to arms in self-defence against unprovoked acts of hostility committed against them, against the refusal of any State to allow the peaceable passage of an armed force through its territories subject to fair guarantees, and against all violation of the diplomatic immunities of ambassadors. It is evident that much ingenuity and inventive genius would be required to discriminate clearly between the various occasions of war, lawful and the reverse. It would be possible by skilful special pleading to embrace all

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. VII, Art. 6, Props. VII and VIII, pp. 303–304.
[2] *Ibid.*, Art. 5, Prop. XVII, p. 290.

the military enterprises of Louis XIV within the bounds of lawful warfare. Even his high-handed treatment of the Apostolic See might be justified on the technical ground of the violation of diplomatic immunity. But it is difficult to suppose, if Louis XIV's military activities be justified, that any aggressive campaign could not be excused or palliated. The apologetic of Bossuet on this matter was unusually hesitant and uncertain. His final statement of conclusions revealed the conflict of principles within his mind. For whereas he was compelled to admit that "granted these necessary conditions, war is not only legitimate, but also righteous and holy," yet his last word expressed the deeper conviction that "God loves the peacemakers, and He prefers the glories of peace to those of arms, however holy and righteous the warfare may be."[1] Such a verdict, published in the year of Malplaquet, would have a melancholy rather than a consolatory accent to the ears of the vanquished Louis XIV, whose kingdom was sinking under the burden of military expeditions.

Into the problems and tasks of civil administration Bossuet did not enter deeply nor in detail. His education of the Dauphin did not embrace the construction of an ideal State, which his pupil might realise in the actual circumstances of his reign, but the instruction of the heir apparent to a kingdom of which the administrative system was already crystallised and defined. In view of this circumstance he was at pains to defend the magnificence which characterised the court of contemporary France. The dignity of monarchy depended to a not inconsiderable degree upon the maintenance of a royal State, the expenses of which were not less necessary than those required to maintain the defences of the kingdom. "The expenses required by magnificence and dignity are not less necessary in their province, for the maintenance of royal majesty in the eyes of the people and of strangers."[2] The precedent for such extravagance was to be found in the glory of Solomon, the recital of whose splendours would be "an infinite labour," yet one which the Holy Spirit had thought fit to undertake. Forgetful or regardless of the observation of One greater than Solomon concerning the incomparable beauty

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. IX, Art. 4, Props. VI and VII, pp. 386–388.
[2] *Ibid.*, Liv. X, Art. 1, Prop. I, pp. 417–420.

of the lilies of the field, Bossuet affirmed with certainty that "God wished the Court of kings to have both splendour and magnificence in order to inspire the people with a sentiment of respect." [1]

Such extravagance demanded necessarily a rich country and heavy taxation to sustain its burden. The king must therefore take all measures for the encouragement of trade and commerce, as Colbert had done, and in return for his paternal solicitude could justly exact taxes from his subjects and tribute from conquered peoples. Prudence, however, counselled moderation in the levy of dues; "the prince ought to be moderate in his impositions and not to overwhelm his people." For the ultimate wealth of the nation consisted in the increase of its population and the growth of a prosperous, well-equipped, and self-reliant manhood. The care of the due increase of population was a prime duty of the ruler.

> It is especially necessary to pay attention to marriages, to provide facilities for the education of the young, and to suppress illicit alliances. The fidelity, the sanctity, and the happiness of marriage is a public concern, and a source of prosperity to the State.[2]

Bossuet iterated for the guidance of his pupil the ancient saw: "In the multitude of people is the king's glory; but in the want of people is the destruction of a prince."

Inevitably the multitude of duties, judicial, legislative, and executive, which beset the monarch were too great for his personal supervision. Hence arose the necessity of counsellors, and the still greater need of the most careful discrimination on the part of the prince in the choice of advisers. To this end was directed the Dauphin's study of practical events and the reactions of men towards them. No branch of the royal office was more important than this. The king must select wise counsellors, not giving himself over to the opinions of young men, lest their inexperience should lead him to disaster, as in the case of the ill-fated Rehoboam, King of Judah. But even if the counsel of the royal advisers was eminently wise the right of decision was reserved to the king. As the responsibility for the results of any policy would rest upon the sovereign, and

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. X, Art. 1, Prop. I, pp. 417–420.
[2] *Ibid.*, Liv. X, Art. 1, Prop. XII, p. 430.

be accounted to him by God, so the power of decision must rest solely with him. Counsellors, though carefully chosen and of eminent sagacity, did not share the dignity or responsibility of their master.[1]

The position of the absolute monarch, as conceived by Bossuet, was essentially distinct from that of the arbitrary ruler. Absolute and arbitrary government were not synonymous, for there were four fundamental differences between them, which Bossuet was emphatic to elucidate.

> Four conditions accompany this kind of government [that is, arbitrary]. First, the subject people are born slaves—that is to say, they are truly in servitude, for there are no free persons amongst them. Secondly, there are no private rights of property; all things belong to the prince, and there is no right of succession, even from father to son. Thirdly, the prince can dispose at pleasure not only of the goods but also of the lives of his subjects, being of the same condition as slaves. Fourthly, there is no law save the will of the prince. Such are the characteristics of arbitrary power. It is not my purpose to examine whether it is lawful or unlawful. There are peoples, and even great empires, which are contented under it, and it is not my design to arouse in them discontent. It suffices for us to say that arbitrary government is barbarous and odious. Its four conditions are far removed from our circumstances, so that arbitrary government has no place amongst ourselves.[2]

In any consideration of the value of Bossuet's defence of absolute monarchy as a form of human government it is essential to remember constantly its theological basis. For Bossuet, monarchy was not merely one among many forms of polity, all of equal authority. Although oligarchical, democratic, and even arbitrary governments might exist, serving some unknown purpose in the Providence of God, they were all but perversions of the true ideal, the paternal monarchy. This monarchy was the reflection of the Monarchy of God, the lineal descendant of the paternal rule of Adam, and the most venerable and widespread of all actual forms of political constitution. Thus conceived, the office of king was one of great dignity and responsibility. The correspondence between the ideal of

[1] *La Politique*, Liv. X, Art. 2, "Ses Conseils," pp. 432–450.
[2] *Ibid.*, Liv. VIII, Art. 2, Prop. I, p. 319.

kingship set forth by Bossuet and the position of the father-abbot expounded by St Benedict is remarkably close. The author of the monastic rule spoke of the abbot as *pater* and as *magister*; he concentrated all authority and power within the monastery in the abbot's hands; he required the abbot to take counsel with his brethren, but "audiens consilium fratrum, tractet apud se, et quod utilius iudicaverit, faciat"; and, having thus placed untrammelled power in his hands and undivided responsibility upon his shoulders, he trusted to the abbot's sense of his accountability before God for the welfare of his flock, to safeguard him against the temptations towards tyranny. This combination of absolute power with the responsibility to God alone for its exercise was characteristic both of St Benedict and of Bossuet. For the Bishop of Meaux regarded the king as the father and ruler of his people; all power within the State proceeded from and flowed into the royal person; the wise sovereign would take the advice of counsellors, but would reserve the right of decision to himself; and, finally, though raised to such a dignity in order to rule as a true father, the prince was responsible only to God for his policy and actions. St Benedict legislated for a religious community, designed to reproduce within its corporate life the precepts of the Gospel. Bossuet translated the monastic rule of paternal monarchy into the practical world of secular politics.

Theoretically and ideally the *régime* of paternal monarchy is irreproachable. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. But Bossuet had before him also the spectacle of the actual and imperfect expression of that ideal in the absolutism of Louis XIV. In the transition from the perfect type of kingship laid up in the heavens, or even from its microcosm established in the Benedictine cloister, to the sordid reproduction at the Court of Versailles many of the noble and disinterested elements had been sullied by the degeneracy of human sovereigns. Bossuet was defending not the perfect and the ideal, but the corrupt and the actual Bourbon tyranny. He delineated the differences which marked off absolute from arbitrary government, without considering by what easy stages the former might degenerate into the latter. Yet signs were not lacking that in the contemporary condition of France the degeneracy to that "barbarous and odious" form of government was far

advanced. Neither the sense of his responsibility towards God, nor the self-interest which moved a king to desire a contented and prosperous people, could restrain Louis XIV from embarking upon a policy of insensate aggression which led to the war with the European alliance and the humiliation of military disasters.

Herein lay the weakness of Bossuet's political writings. His official position precluded him from essaying an impartial and scientific study of the comparative merits of monarchical, oligarchic, and democratic constitutions. His work partook necessarily of the nature of an apologia for absolute monarchy. Yet within even the restricted field of apologetic some elements of criticism are not forbidden. With Bossuet, however, eulogy alone was permitted. His championship of absolute monarchy had to become a defence of Louis XIV, who did not allow the privilege of adverse opinion to his Court. Thus *La Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte* was doubly vitiated. The talents of Bossuet were immeasurably superior to those of the myriad sycophants who lavished compliments upon *le Roi Soleil*, but to him as to them panegyric was the only form of composition which found acceptance with their master. When Bossuet was summoned to the responsible office of tutor to the Dauphin it was not intended that he should suggest to his pupil the existence of defects in the government of France. "The messenger that went to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying: Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the King with one mouth: let thy word be like one of them, and speak thou good."

Despite the ingenious artifice and eloquence of Bossuet, however, the Bourbon monarchy could not be saved. Within a century of his death the deluge had descended, obliterating the political and ecclesiastical institutions which he had striven to defend. His philosophy was essentially built upon the sanctity of tradition and of established authority. In all his writings, theological and political, he was the father of them that look backward. The eighteenth-century rationalists, who set the intellectual fashion of the succeeding age, denied that external authority or the appeal to tradition had any validity or prescriptive right. They refused to inquire whether social institutions rested upon an ancient divine command; instead

they tested all things by the measure of contemporary utilitarian advantage, and swept away the venerable corporations of the past. Thus the fabric of absolute monarchy, albeit the reflection of the divine monarchy and the heir of the paternal *régime* of Adam, was rudely shattered. It is true that Bossuet might have pleaded in justification of his works that the absolutism of the Bourbon was succeeded by the arbitrary government of Napoleon I; but even that tyranny was not destined to endure. At least the venerable hereditary monarchy, to the defence of which he had consecrated his erudition and eloquence, and for the cause of whose prosperity he had averted his glance from all other forms of polity, was destroyed by rebellion and regicide. To the Scripture which Bossuet quoted as proof of the divine prescription of monarchy—"I have said, Ye are Gods"—there should be added the conclusion of the psalmist's counsel: "But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes!"

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III

FÉNELON

IT may seem necessary at first sight to justify the inclusion of Fénelon in a series of lectures devoted to the social and political thinkers of the Age of Reason. Bossuet, of course, although he stands as the first figure in this group of thinkers, nobody would dream of claiming as in any way allied to the rest. He is the very antithesis of them all (except Fénelon), but he is there for that very reason. He incarnates better, perhaps, than any man except Louis XIV himself the ideals and principles of government on which the *ancien régime* was based. We are therefore in a better position to estimate the aims and accomplishments of what is known (however badly the term may suit it) as the Age of Reason, once we have clearly before us the edifice against which it directed the weapons of its thought. But having conceded Bossuet, not, indeed, as being *of* the Age of Reason, but as showing by contrast what the thinkers of that age were opposed to, one may well ask, Why another of the same class? Was not Fénelon too a bishop and an eminent pillar of the Church whose very existence was imperilled by the thinkers of the Age of Reason? Was he not also convinced of the divine right of kings? Was he not too one of the literary glories of the age of Louis XIV? How, then, can he conceivably be introduced into the Age of Reason and made to take his place beside Voltaire and Rousseau? The answer is twofold. In the first place, he represents the transition, he makes a link between the absolutism of Louis, as it was enshrined, condoned, and justified in the works of Bossuet, and the forward-looking, liberal spirit of Montesquieu. In politics there are no sudden movements, nothing takes place by jerks, and the gap between Bossuet's thinking and that of Montesquieu would be impossible—

nay, inconceivable—did one not recognise in thinkers of whom Fénelon is the most representative a bridge from one age to the other. Secondly, it must be remembered that there is another Fénelon besides the mystical prelate who wrote *Télémaque*. There is the Fénelon whom the eighteenth century invented. The philosophers of the eighteenth century enjoyed a privilege not usually bestowed on mortals: they were able to choose their ancestors, and one cannot but admire, from their point of view, the choice they made when they singled out Fénelon as the father of doctrines on which he himself would have looked with abhorrence. This legendary Fénelon was not the creation of a day, nor of a single man, but, like ordinary beings, he acquired new virtues as the years went by. Like ordinary beings too—or some of them—he has his biographer, M. Chérel, whose excellent work on *Fénelon au XVIIIème siècle en France* makes it possible for us to trace out every step of the life of this new Fénelon.

We have not time here, however, to follow him through from the day when he first saw the light in the pages of the Scotsman Ramsay up to the time when he was piously interred again, as so many great writers are, under a tombstone called "Œuvres Complètes." But, nevertheless, before we turn to the real Fénelon it will be interesting to glance first at this legendary one, and see what family likeness he bears to his elder brother. He is a priest, of course, this new Fénelon; but one would hardly notice that, so careful is he to keep out of the way all those awkward and thorny questions of doctrine, and so sympathetic is he, so ready to grant absolution. He is a bishop too, but this again one almost forgets, so simple and unassuming is he, so kind to all his flock, and so eager to devote all the episcopal revenue to the help of the poor. In an age when the principal amusement of young and old alike was weeping we can imagine what tears of joy and *sensibilité* were shed over every anecdote of the good Bishop's life. The incident of the cow is typical and worth relating if we wish to see something of the humble virtues of the legendary Fénelon. Fénelon met one evening, while returning alone to his palace, a young man in great distress at the loss of a cow, the sole support of his numerous

family. The kindly prelate gave him money to buy another, but even then the poor fellow could not stop weeping at the thought of the animal his wife had milked and his children had so dearly loved, and which, he feared, might have fallen into the hands of the enemy (for the time of this story is placed during the Wars of the Spanish Succession, when Fénelon's episcopal palace at Cambrai was in the centre of the war area). Fénelon spoke words of comfort to the afflicted man and went on his way; but soon after parting with him he came across a cow which he easily identified as the missing one, and, thinking only of the joy it would bring to the stricken home, he himself, although the night was dark and dreary, drove it back to the poor labourer's cottage. What could be more calculated to endear him to an age which wept with Manon and Desgrieux and which felt almost as if it had experienced a family loss when Rousseau's Julie died?

This new Fénelon, however, was not only an *âme sensible*, he was also a hero and a martyr. He alone had dared to brave the wrath of the tyrant Louis and tell him to his face that kings are made for their people and not people for kings; he had been, moreover, a victim to that most odious form of tyranny, religious fanaticism. The Christian charity which had characterised the real Fénelon was stretched and distorted into a universal tolerance; it became, in fact (as M. Chérel says), a philosophical charity, "indulgent to man, full of confidence in nature, heedless of dogma, thoughtful above all of popular well-being, severe on conquering kings, hating force and all the uses to which it is put, and associating in a joint condemnation all authority and force."

Such are some of the traits of the Fénelon whom the eighteenth century adored, a sort of earlier edition of the Vicaire Savoyard; such is the Fénelon whose valet, according to his own confession, Rousseau would gladly have been—a Fénelon divested of his Christianity and enrolled under the banner of the new religion of humanitarianism, universal brotherhood, optimism, and progress. There can, then, be no question as to the justice of including him in this volume.

The eighteenth-century philosophers were not, however, the only people to misrepresent Fénelon. Indeed, it would be difficult to find any great thinker whose ideas have been

so diversely interpreted. Communists claim him as theirs because of his attacks on wealth and luxury; Royalists would gladly find a place for him under the Action Française as one who saw clearly that the destinies of France would be safe in no hands but those of a God-fearing king; aristocrats worship him because of his wish to restore French nobility to its former grandeur; constitutional liberals claim him as their particular champion. Whence, then, this extraordinary diversity of opinion—a diversity which rarely extends to the serious historians of political science, who are usually content to give him his little niche close to Bossuet, put a label "Benevolent Despot" over him, and leave it at that? The reason is partly religious or political prejudice; partly also that the legendary Fénelon will insist on interposing himself between them and the truth; but still more a determination to look for Fénelon's political views in all of his works except in his political ones. Like many other prolific writers who have produced one outstanding masterpiece, Fénelon remains for many the man of one work—his *Télémaque*. Now, whatever may be the merits or defects of *Télémaque* as literature, we must remember that it was written by Fénelon only for the perusal of his royal pupil, the Duke of Burgundy, in whom it was intended to inculcate certain general principles of political morals rather than of politics, in a form which should not be too unpalatable for a boy of twelve; that it was published without Fénelon's consent; and that it was meant first and foremost as an "agreeable fiction." Yet because of the prestige it gained from the very first it was assumed to represent Fénelon's definitive pronouncements on matters of politics. So it comes about that whereas Fénelon was a man who was deeply interested in all the affairs of his country, a man who showed an alertness to the social and political problems of his day which was exceedingly rare in men of his class, and one, too, who has left behind him a number of works which testify to his power to discern and his courage to denounce the evils in the state of France under Louis XIV, yet his rank as a political thinker is only too frequently estimated from one work alone, and that a novel—written to teach a small boy to appreciate his classics and to keep his passions under control. Sometimes, it is true,

Télémaque is supplemented, by those who have scruples about seeking for Fénelon's thought in his novel alone, by the philosophical *Essay on Civil Government*, but as this work was not even written by Fénelon, but composed by a Scottish Jacobite from conversations he had had with him at Cambrai, it cannot be accepted without certain reservations. It is, then, almost as if one were to attempt to set out Disraeli's political ideas from *Vivian Grey* and, shall we say, André Maurois. The consequence is that Fénelon is regarded sometimes as a pillar of monarchy and an opponent of the rights of the people, sometimes as an elder brother of Marat, Robespierre, and even Karl Marx, and sometimes, and perhaps oftener, as an ingenious inventor of political fictions which would look well enough if they could be dramatised and shown at the Opéra Comique, but which have not the slightest relation to real life. Does this mean, then, that we should take no account of *Télémaque* in considering Fénelon's political ideas? No; it bears only too clearly the marks of his highest aspirations. Through it, as through all that he ever wrote, there run, like a refrain, a hatred of the hideousness of war, a yearning for peace and brotherhood amongst men, and a warning to monarchs that happiness will be realised in their States only in so far as they themselves set an example of selflessness, devotion to duty, and love for their people. Where these broad principles of political ethics are concerned we have every right to see in *Télémaque* a reflection of Fénelon's thought. But where it is a question of the reformer alive to the crying needs of his country, and of the practical politician who for one brief moment was on the verge of holding the reins of government, nothing could be so unfair as to leave his practical suggestions on one side and judge of his political capacity from a novel.

II

With these warnings we may turn now to see something of the real Fénelon in his life and his writings. François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon—to give him his full name—was born at the *château* of the Fénelon family in Périgord, in 1651 (twenty-four years after Bossuet and thirteen years after

Louis XIV). Of his early career we know comparatively little, but three important formative influences stand out clearly in the environment and atmosphere in which his early days were passed. Firstly, he belonged to an ancient and noble family whose ancestors had distinguished themselves in former reigns on the battlefield, in diplomacy, in the Church, and in literature; and he was impressed from his very earliest years with the dignity, the responsibility, and worth of the class to which he belonged. Nor could anyone have been better fitted to instil into him this respect for nobility than the uncle—the Marquis de Fénelon—who took charge of Fénelon's upbringing on the death of his father (an event which occurred while Fénelon was still a boy). The Marquis was one of the finest types of the old aristocrat of the days when the nobility had not yet been humiliated to the rank of supers at a gigantic pageant. He was chivalrous and courageous, but sternly opposed to petty quarrels of honour, mindful of his rank, but free from ridiculous pretensions and ostentation; a man of accomplishments, but living a life of Christian humility and charity; a man, finally, of whom the great Condé said that he was equally fitted for conversation, for war, and for studies. From him Fénelon learned to respect his king, but not to consider him as endowed with divine virtues and exempt from the failings of ordinary men, and it was no doubt his lessons that helped to preserve Fénelon from that superstitious admiration for royalty which was so characteristic of the *bourgeois* class from which Bossuet had sprung.

The second of these early influences was that of an exemplary piety and an atmosphere of religious devotion with which Fénelon was surrounded both by his mother and by his uncle. This contributed more than anything to reveal to him the direction in which his career lay. He did not become a priest as a *pis aller*, nor did he, like many a prelate of his day, use the Church merely as a stepping-stone to secular advancement. He was eminently marked out from the beginning for a preacher of the word of God, and, whatever anxiety he may have caused other dignitaries of the Church later on in matters of doctrine, there is no question as to the intensity and earnestness of his faith. To represent

Fénelon as a lay evangelist, to look for the politician without taking into account also the theologian, is to do him the greatest injustice. The third all-important influence was that of classical—and more particularly Greek—culture. At an early age he revealed singular qualities of scholarship and learning; he had learnt to appreciate Plato and Homer at an age when most of us are struggling with declensions and conjugations. Before he was called upon to consider the political needs of his own country he was fully penetrated with the Greek view of life. His conception of the State as one body of citizens all working together for one common aim—a better and a nobler life—bears everywhere the marks of a lover of Plato. His *Télémaque*, too, is more than a mere pastiche of the *Odyssey*; it is the work of a man who has thoroughly assimilated Greek culture. The ease, the elegance, and the indefinable grace and charm of all that he wrote show how with the years his love of the Greek ideal became strengthened and matured.

It was, then, in the school of ancient chivalry, of religion, and of Greek culture that Fénelon received his first lessons. We need not follow him through his early training farther than to note that after studying at the University of Cahors, near his own home, he came to Paris, where after a stay at the Collège du Plessis he was entered at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. All that we hear of him at this time seems to point to a young man of unusual talents and devotion. He was ordained on leaving Saint-Sulpice, in 1675 (at the age of twenty-four). He felt at first that his path lay in the direction of foreign mission work rather than in the humble duties of the stay-at-home priest, and at one time he had designs on the Levant as the scenes of his labours. His letters show him filled with an almost romantic fervour at the thought of visiting the glowing Orient and the homes of ancient civilisations. In fact, however, his missionary work began at Paris, where he was appointed, in 1678, as the superior of an institution called the Nouvelles Catholiques, where girls of good families who had been recently converted from Protestantism were coached in the tenets of their new faith. For Fénelon the post was a useful one. It brought his name to the notice of the King (who naturally was very interested in the work of

such an institution—for the period of which we are speaking was only seven years before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes). Moreover, it brought Fénelon for the first time face to face with questions of practical policy, and since the question of religious toleration is to be one of the most important in France for all future politicians it is interesting to see Fénelon, at the outset of his career, called upon to give it his consideration. On the essential morality of the conversion of Protestants he never for one moment had the shadow of a doubt—one must not, then, expect him to understand that there can exist such a thing as liberty of conscience. As an exponent of the only true Gospel it was his duty to bring all the lost sheep back to the fold. But for doing this there are different means; some of them—such as physical coercion, for example—are entirely reprehensible; but others—such as kindness and gentle persuasion, an appeal to reason and sentiment, and even the use of subtle dialectics to prove the errors of the So-called Reformed Church—are, according to him, absolutely praiseworthy. These were the methods he himself employed; but we can be sure that if they were so eminently successful (as the Catholics would have us believe) it was chiefly because of the charm and sweetness of Fénelon's personality. In a third way this post was useful to Fénelon. It gave him that insight into feminine psychology which gives a particular charm to his letters, and is, in fact, so marked a feature of many of his works. Too many politicians are apt to legislate for a State composed solely of males. Fénelon was one of the few who realised the enormous part that women play in the well-being of the State.

It is from this point of view that we must regard his first work, his *Traité de l'éducation des filles*, which appeared in 1687. One would like to linger for some time over such a delightful book, surely the most pleasing of all his works. It is full of ideas which were strikingly new at this time, and which also appeared strikingly new nearly a hundred years later, when Rousseau appropriated them and put them into his *Émile*. Follow and help nature; do not be in a hurry to cram knowledge into the child, but adapt your instruction to the capacity of the child's mind; mingle play with work; do not make education synonymous with tears. We usually, he says in

this connexion, put all pleasure on one side and all boredom on the other—all boredom in studies and all pleasure in amusements. What can a poor child do except to put up as well as he can with the one and run madly after the other? Make your child interested and he will love learning; make religion and virtue amiable to him and he will have no use for vice. A good deal of this, we know, is already in Montaigne, but Montaigne had disdained to occupy himself with female education. For Fénelon, however, the question is one of the very greatest importance. He asks:

> Haven't women duties to fulfil, and duties which are the very foundation of human life? Isn't it women who ruin or who hold together the household, who regulate the details of domestic matters and who consequently decide on all points which affect most closely the whole of mankind? Even men themselves, who have all authority in public, cannot, with all their deliberations, effect any lasting good if their wives do not help them to carry it out.

And yet, he goes on to ask, how are they usually prepared for this task which has such a vital bearing on the welfare of the State? Simply according to the custom and caprice of mothers. While the education of boys is considered as all-important in its relation to the State as a whole, and a complete machinery of schools and universities and masters is put into motion, researches are undertaken, money is spent, and everything is done to make their education as perfect as possible, what happens to girls? We are merely told that they don't need to learn anything; it is sufficient for them to know something of their household duties and to be able to obey their husbands without reasoning. And for this, what need have they of science, and, besides, what could be more ridiculous than a *femme savante*? Precisely, replies Fénelon, what could be more ridiculous? But educate all women rationally and there will be no *femmes savantes*. It is the present system which, by encouraging in women a quality that they are unfortunately only too inclined to by nature—namely, vanity—stimulates them to seek for distinction in science. Do not let women idle away their time in luxury, dancing, frivolous conversations, novel-reading, and the study of fashions and dress. Ignorance, says Fénelon, is not a pre-

servative against frivolity; it merely causes a girl to be bored, so that she does not know where to look for innocent amusement; and coupled with laziness it only produces a "pernicious taste for amusements and spectacles." But make her see the dignity of her *rôle*, encourage her to use her reason, accustom her from the first to interest herself in noble things, and she will be a credit to the State and a potent factor in its welfare.

Like all good politicians, then, and especially like his Greek masters, Fénelon sees that sound politics can be built up only on sound education; that the reform of the State is inseparable from the reform of the individual.

We must pass on more rapidly to the rest of Fénelon's career. His conduct of the Nouvelles Catholiques had won him such esteem that he was chosen shortly after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes for the rather delicate task of winning over the Protestants in the district of Poitou to the Catholic faith. It is no doubt from this episode in his career that the legend of his tolerance first arose. It is difficult for us to see how a man who put his heart and soul into the work of converting Protestants, who had no doubts as to the divine inspiration of the Revocation, and who used every means in his power, short of physical violence, can be called in the modern sense of the word 'tolerant.' That he was mild and gentle, that he deprecated the use of force and, in fact, asked the King to withdraw the troops who had so valiantly supported the true Gospel against opponents who were comparatively unorganised and unarmed, is all to his credit. But he can see only obstinacy and wilful perversion in men who refuse to believe what is to him so dazzlingly clear and obvious. If there is not exactly any harshness there is a certain tone of contemptuous impatience with these heretics in letters he writes during his mission. He writes to the Marquis de Seignelai (February 7, 1686):

> It seems to me that the King's authority should not be relaxed in the very slightest; for our arrival in this district, together with the rumours of war which continually arrive here from Holland, are beginning to make these people think that we are afraid of them and are letting them off lightly. . . . While authority should be inflexible in restraining these minds whom the slightest softness renders insolent, I am of opinion that it would be important to assure them in

> France of a certain degree of comfort and happiness which would rid them of any desire to leave the country.

And again:

> The hard and undocile nature of these people needs a vigorous and ever-watchful authority. We mustn't do them any harm, but it is essential that they should feel a hand always raised above them in case they should resist.

In a letter to Bossuet, too, he admires the bravery and strength of the early Christian martyrs and yet complains that the Huguenots are attached to their religion even to the most horrid excesses of stubbornness. But in spite of the attitude which these letters only too clearly reveal, Fénelon was suspected in certain quarters, so great was the proselytising fervour which the Revocation had stirred up amongst Catholics, of too much kindness and condescension to the rebels and heretics; and it may possibly have been for this reason that he failed to get either of the two bishoprics that were vacant at about this period (although it must be said that he himself had not sought for any such advancement).

He returned to Paris in 1688 and resumed his directorship of the Nouvelles Catholiques. By this time he was a figure who was already beginning to attract considerable notice. The insinuations which had been made about his excessive tenderness to the Huguenots had not been able to hide the real extent of his conversions and the general success of his mission. His work on female education he had allowed against his own wishes to be published, and it had won immediate favour. A second work, on a religious subject, had also helped to make his name better known. He enjoyed, too, the friendship of Bossuet, of the director of Saint-Sulpice, M. Tronson, and of the Duke of Beauvilliers, who, as the son-in-law of Colbert, wielded a considerable influence at Court, especially in the circle of Mme de Maintenon. In 1689 came the advancement for which his friends had waited: he was appointed tutor to the Duke of Burgundy, the eldest grandson of Louis XIV and heir-presumptive to the throne. The education of a prince in those days meant practically the setting up of a whole department of State. At the head of the department in this case was the Duke of Beauvilliers, as

Gouverneur; next came Fénelon as *Précepteur*; then came sub-governors and sub-preceptors, *lecteurs* to read to the boy and hear him say his lessons and gentlemen to take him out and exercise him. Researches were instituted, works of erudition compiled, maps drawn, historical pictures and charts prepared—and for whom was all this complicated machinery set up? We cannot do better than quote the well-known picture which Saint-Simon gives us of the young Duke at the age of seven, before Fénelon took him in hand:

> Monsieur le duc de Bourgogne naquit terrible, et dans sa première jeunesse fit trembler. Dur, colère jusqu'aux derniers emportements contre les choses inanimées, impétueux avec fureur, incapable de souffrir la moindre résistance, même des heures et des éléments, sans entrer dans des fougues à faire craindre que tout ne se rompît dans sa main, c'est ce dont j'ai été souvent témoin; opiniâtre à l'excès, passionné pour tous les plaisirs, la bonne chère, la chasse avec fureur, la musique avec une sorte de ravissement et le jeu, encore où il ne pouvait supporter d'être vaincu, et où le danger avec lui était extrême; enfin, livré à toutes les passions et transporté de tous les plaisirs; souvent farouche, naturellement porté à la cruauté, barbare en raillerie

Even allowing for a little picturesque exaggeration on the part of Saint-Simon, one must admit that it hardly sounds promising material out of which to make a king. Yet this passionate little monster, full of precocious vice, Fénelon managed, by his patience and kindness, to transform into one of the mildest princes ever seen, a very pattern of charity, devotion, and thoughtfulness, one might almost say a Prince Albert as seen by Queen Victoria. To quote Saint-Simon again:

> De cette abîme sortit un prince affable, doux, humain, modéré, patient, modeste, humble, et austère pour soi, tout appliqué à ses obligations et les comprenant immenses; il ne pensa plus qu'à allier les devoirs de fils et de sujet à ceux auxquels il se voyait destiné.

As to whether Fénelon carried his duty of taming this rebellious spirit too far, and crushed, as has so often been said, all his initiative and independence, it is not easy to pronounce. It is true that Fénelon was blamed by many for the effeminacy and excessive scrupulousness with regard to petty details of religion which his pupil showed in later years. Most of us would agree that the transformation was nothing short of

miraculous. It is a pity we have no time to dwell on the methods of Fénelon and how he brought about this change. Suffice it to say that from the very beginning he realised the enormous importance of the charge entrusted to him—it was nothing less than that of forming a future king for France; in a sense, then, he felt that the future destinies of the whole French nation were in his keeping.

In tackling this enormous task there was no precedent he could follow. Bossuet's example could hardly have been of any use to him. Bossuet had no doubt considered his tutorship of the Dauphin as a terribly serious mission; he had spared no pains to acquire knowledge anew so that his pupil should have the results of the very latest erudition. Yet judged by its fruits, he cannot be said to have made a success of his work. There was something too rigid and inflexible about Bossuet; he stood too much on his dignity and authority ever to gain the affection of the Dauphin, as Fénelon did of his pupil. He was unable to come down to his level, and although some of the works he wrote for him—particularly his *Discourse on Universal History*—are masterpieces, one is not surprised to learn that the only effect they produced on the Dauphin was to make him say that when his education was over he would never open a book again for the rest of his life. Fénelon, then, had to think out all his problems for himself, and nowhere is the originality and flexibility of his mind better displayed than in his training of the young prince.

We have said that there were no precedents which would help him. He kept, however, constantly before his eyes, and before those of his pupil, two models: the one, St Louis, just, pious, humble, full of paternal devotion to his people, and always sharing their sorrows and afflictions; and the other, Louis XIV, whose despotism, immorality, and hypocrisy he continually held up as warnings. In a sense, his teaching, on every point, is the very antithesis of the practice of Louis XIV (not, of course, that he ever names Louis to his pupil or ever speaks of him in any but the most respectful terms); he wanted to make the young Duke everything that Louis was not. To do this he saw that the thing to begin with was moral character—make the boy God-fearing, upright, truthful, humble, thoughtful for others, and the good

ruler would be bound to follow. Bossuet had seen this, and to make his pupil moral he had written him a treatise on the knowledge of God and of oneself, of which the Dauphin quite certainly never read a line. Fénelon's method was just what we should expect from his treatise on the education of girls. If he wished to correct his pupil of a fault he would write him a pretty little fable ; if he wanted to let him know that he had been greedy, had shown bad temper or been disrespectful to those in charge of him, a little fairy-story, of which the application was obvious, even to a small boy's mind, was readily forthcoming. As he grew older and needed to know something of history, politics, and military strategy (for Fénelon wisely saw that these were the subjects he would need most), instead of forcing him to read dull and stodgy works of erudition, he wrote some excellent little *Dialogues of the Dead*, some of which are quite worthy to be placed beside those of Walter Savage Landor. We cannot, unfortunately, spend much time on these, although for a revelation of the trend of Fénelon's political thought they are not negligible, but we may be allowed to quote from one, since it is taken from our own history. It is a dialogue between Henry VII and Henry VIII.

HENRY VII. Well, my son, and how did you reign when I had gone?

HENRY VIII. Happily and gloriously for thirty-eight years.

HENRY VII. That sounds very fine. But tell me, were the other people as pleased with you as you seem to be with yourself ?

HENRY VIII. I'm only telling you the truth. [*And Henry proceeds to boast of all that he did for the country.*]

HENRY VII. But I've heard that the Pope gave you the title of Defender of the Faith because of a book you wrote against the ideas of Luther. How is it that you changed afterwards?

HENRY VIII. Why, I recognised how unjust and superstitious the Roman Church was.

HENRY VII. Did it thwart you, then, in any way?

HENRY VIII. Yes. I wanted to unmarry. I didn't care much about that Aragon person; I wanted to marry Anne Boleyn. . . .

HENRY VII. Oh! and what happened?

HENRY VIII. Well, I just broke with Rome, laughed at its censures, married Anne, and made myself head of the Anglican Church.

HENRY VII. But I have heard that you were fickle, frivolous, lascivious, cruel, and sanguinary.

HENRY VIII. Oh! It's those Papists who've been running me down.

HENRY VII. Never mind about the Papists, let's come down to the facts. Didn't you have six wives, of whom you repudiated the first without any just cause, put the second to death, caused an operation to be performed on the third in order to save her child, put the fourth to death, repudiated the fifth, and made such a bad choice with the last that she married an admiral a few days after your death?

HENRY VIII. That's all very true. But if you only knew what sort of women they were you'd pity me instead of condemning me. The Aragon person was ugly and virtuous to boredom, Anne Boleyn was a scandalous flirt, Jane Seymour hardly any better, Catherine Howard a most corrupt woman, the Princess of Cleves very statuesque, but without any charm; the last one appeared to me a sensible woman, but she showed after my death that I had made a mistake about her. No, I must admit that I was duped by all these women.

This may seem rather strong meat for a little boy of ten, but it is not without its lessons and its warnings, all the same. The rest of the *Dialogues*, too, taken some from the classics, some from ancient history, and some from modern history, are all intended to teach in easy and interesting form some important lessons of politics and morals—despotism strongly condemned, no unjust conquests, virtuous citizens, simple manners, freedom and happiness for the people, the responsibilities of kingship; these are some of the themes that continually recur in the teaching of all the *Dialogues*.

Of the other important work which Fénelon wrote for his pupil we may as well say something now, since, as has already been said, it need not be taken seriously into account when we come to consider general theories of the State. *Télémaque* was presumably written between 1694 and 1696, and published for the first time, incompletely and without Fénelon's consent, in 1699. It relates, in a prose that is simple, elegant, and graceful, but sometimes a little too sugary and too full of florid descriptions for modern taste, the wanderings of Telemachus in search of his father, Ulysses. He is accompanied by the goddess Minerva (in the form of Mentor), who, at the risk of boring her *protégé* to death, takes every possible opportunity of pointing out to him the excellencies or errors of government

which are to be seen in all the various countries through which they pass. There are, amongst condemnations of the kind we have already referred to in the *Dialogues of the Dead*, two Utopias, and it is probably largely because of these that Fénelon still remains for many people a fantastic and chimerical politician. The first is the republic of La Bétique. This is nothing more than a sort of poetical Arcadia, where we are shown a nation of shepherds, all impossibly virtuous, without any of the passions or needs, and consequently without any of the vices, of ordinary people. All their goods they have placed in common, presumably because they have none. A fraternal love reigns over the whole State. All men there are free and equal, and the only distinction seen amongst them is that which comes from the experience of the wise elders. War is never heard of in this country beloved of the gods; fraud, violence, and perjury are equally removed from their nature; luxury is abhorred—even wine is unknown—and the marriage laws are kept with a touching fidelity. Naturally such a nation is respected by its neighbours, and is, of course, never molested. Unfortunately we are not shown how these happy conditions are arrived at. What is the constitution of this republic, its rulers, and its laws are things we are left to guess at. It must be regarded as outside the realm of political thought, as just a beautiful poetical dream of Fénelon's.

The second of these Utopias is Salente, which, because Fénelon has developed his ideas a little farther in it, and has amused himself by giving fuller details as to dress, manners, architecture, and food, is often considered as being nearer to his real thought. It certainly is in one sense, for it is an aristocratic State, of which the citizens are carefully divided into seven classes, distinguished from one another by their clothes as well as by their condition, their occupation, and their birth (for superiority of birth, according to Mentor, is a superiority of which no man will be jealous). The dress regulations are interesting:

> The first rank will be clad in white, with a fringe of gold at the foot of their robes. They will wear a gold ring on their finger and a medal round their neck bearing the king's portrait. The second rank will be clad in blue; they will wear a silver fringe, the ring, but no medal; the third in green, no ring and no fringe, but with a silver

medal; the fourth in a dawn-yellow; the fifth in pale red or pink; the sixth in flaxen grey, and the seventh, the lowest rank of the people, in a mixture of yellow and white.

Unfortunately Mentor does not say how he is going to prevent petty jealousies amongst these different classes, especially amongst the women of them. What, for example, will happen if Mme X cannot bear dawn-yellow, but wants her husband to be promoted to class three, so that she can have her favourite colour, green? In this republic, where agriculture is the work of all and where each citizen is allotted a piece of ground according to the needs of his family (and not according to his rank, for in this respect at least all are equal), population is represented as the greatest wealth of all, and war and the taxes and miseries that it brings as the greatest of all evils. Yet, in spite of all the detailed rules and regulations which he gives, it is on the fundamental question of government itself that Fénelon is haziest. Although his State is a monarchy, he has to admit that men are much to be pitied, to have to be governed by a king, who is, after all, only a man like themselves. However, since the gods cannot govern us the next best thing is that the king should be himself an example of virtue and of simplicity to his subjects, that he should be the father of his people and should aspire to make himself beloved rather than feared, that he should cast out all flattering counsellors and keep only as his advisers men who are entirely disinterested, that he should be always ready for war if his country is attacked, but should abstain from wars of aggression. All very excellent counsels, no doubt, but belonging more to the domain of political morals than of politics proper. As to rights of the people, there is never any question of them at all. In some ways, in fact, Salente seems to be a country in which the D.O.R.A. has been expanded into a constitution. In addition to the points already mentioned about dress and property there are numerous prohibitions and sumptuary laws. Wine, for example, is banned, or at least is used (as in the United States) only for medicinal purposes; all arts which encourage luxuries are suppressed (although painting and sculpture are kept—but only for those obviously fitted for them, and even then their talents must be placed at the service of the State). People who will not work are punished, and those who serve

the State either by their industry or by helping to populate it are rewarded or get a rebate from their income-tax, although one does not quite see what use this will be to them, since there are no luxuries on which they may spend their savings, and their work will already have provided them with the necessities of life. Architecture must be simple and graceful and furniture plain and serviceable; food too should be plain and simple, highly seasoned dishes especially are to be considered as a crime against the State, since indulgence in such luxuries tends to ruin the bodies and souls of citizens. Any music of a soft or effeminate character must be rigorously excluded, since music is only needed at feasts in the temple, and its function is to sing the praises of the gods and of heroes who have given examples of rare virtues. There shall be plenty of athletic sports to keep the people fit. A stern watch is to be kept over the morals of families and of private individuals (with magistrates appointed to carry this out, and even the king taking a turn from time to time as a sort of superior policeman). In this way a great number of disorders and crimes will be prevented. Those that cannot be prevented must be severely punished. "By a little drop of blood shed at the right time," says the mild Fénelon, "you can spare a good deal later on, and make yourself feared without using force." Although the aim of all this legislation is a noble and elevated one—to produce a State full of happy and virtuous citizens—it would be difficult to conceive a system under which the individual rights of the people are so constantly interfered with. One might well ask, too, since there are no spectacles, except a few contests staged by the State, no luxury arts, no music, no politics to take any interest in, no adult education, What becomes of all the spare energy of the population, especially as Mentor does not even arrange a little war now and then? The answer seems to be that you keep the people so hard at work that they have no time or energy to spare for anything but earning their bread.

> Each family, being numerous and having only a small piece of ground, will need to cultivate it with unceasing toil. Softness and idleness are the two things which make a nation insolent and rebellious. They will have bread, it is true, and a fair amount; but they will have bread only, together with the fruits of their own land won by the sweat of their own brows.

But it would be too easy to go on criticising the constitution of Salente, and it is not in this imaginary kingdom that the value of the book lies. Its real interest is as the severest and most outspoken condemnation that had yet been made of the absolutism of Louis XIV, and as a picture of the condition to which France had been reduced by his arbitrariness. Fénelon defended himself, it is true, from any satirical intentions which might be read into his book, so did La Bruyère; but the criticism is none the less implicit throughout the whole work. If we wanted any proof of this we should find it in a most extraordinary letter he addressed to Louis XIV at about the time when he must have begun the composition of *Télémaque*, and as this letter represents the reality of which *Télémaque* is only the fictional transposition we need not return to the novel again, but follow up Fénelon's criticism from the letter itself.

This letter was never delivered to Louis XIV, nor is it likely that it was ever intended to be. Louis was no lover of plain speaking on the part of his subordinates, and he would no doubt have rewarded the writer of such an epistle with the fate that he meted out to Fouquet. It must be regarded merely as an exercise in invective on the part of Fénelon, and as representing what he would have liked to say to the King had he dared. It seems partly, too, to have been written with the object of stirring Mme de Maintenon and Beauvilliers—the two people with the greatest influence over the King—out of their culpable condonation of the King's faults. In any case, so severe is its tone that its authenticity was denied when it appeared for the first time, in d'Alembert's *History of the Members of the Academy*, and for long afterwards, until the manuscript of it was reproduced in 1825.

The letter begins in a tone of humility, more in sorrow than in anger against his king, although Fénelon recognises in him the elect of God. He warns him that he must be prepared to listen to the truth, a thing that he has never been accustomed to hearing. No doubt, used as he is to flattery, Louis will find that the truth has a rather bitter taste, but Fénelon feels that to conceal anything would be a betrayal of his trust and of his duty to God. The first count is that, possessed of a good and a just heart, he has nevertheless allowed himself to be persuaded to adopt in matters of government a policy of distrust,

of jealousy, of hatred for virtue and fear of any men of distinguished merit, together with an affection for men of an insinuating and servile kind. These men have overturned all the old maxims of government, so that there is now no talk of anything but the King and his good pleasure.

> They have raised you to the skies, because you have outshone, they tell you, the greatness of all your predecessors put together—that is to say, because you have impoverished the whole of France in order to introduce into the Court a monstrous and incurable luxury.

In his name they have subjected his people to the severest tyranny; they have been harsh, haughty, unjust, violent, and of bad faith. While he thinks he has been governing, he has really been leaving all matters that concern the welfare of the State to a few selfish, calculating individuals, concentrating only on acquiring authority and prestige where other nations are concerned. But even this aim he has not attained, for as Fénelon tells him, "On a rendu votre nom odieux, et toute la nation française insupportable à tous nos voisins." He has been the cause of twenty years of war with all its attendant miseries; he has unjustly extended the bounds of his frontiers and has never treated a vanquished enemy fairly, nor shown the slighest respect for international treaties. And what is the result of it all?

> Your people, whom you should love as your children, and who have been up to now so devoted to you, are starving. Agriculture is almost given up, towns and countryside are becoming depopulated; all industries are in a languishing condition and can no longer support their workmen. Trade is utterly crushed. Consequently you have destroyed half the real strength of your State in order to make and defend your futile foreign conquests. Instead of squeezing money out of these poor people, it is your duty to give them alms and to feed them. The whole of France is now nothing but one vast hospital, desolate and resourceless . . . and it is you, Sire, who have drawn all these worries upon yourself. . . . Such is the great and flourishing realm under a king who is depicted to us every day as the delight of his people, and who would be so, indeed, if flattering counsels had not poisoned his mind.

But now, Fénelon goes on, the King is beginning to lose the friendship and even the respect of his people, sedition is

gradually spreading, and yet he dare not quell it with a stern hand, but is forced to buy it off. So far Fénelon has attacked Louis for crimes not entirely of his making, but now he comes to the personal thrusts. It is the King's wilful blindness which is the cause of the present distress.

> You are afraid to open your eyes, you are afraid of being reduced to sacrificing something of your own glory. This glory, which hardens your heart, is dearer to you than justice, than your own peace of mind, than the preservation of your own people, who are dying off daily through illnesses caused by famine.

And then Fénelon warns him of the terrible retribution awaiting him.

> God will one day lift the veil from before your eyes and will show you the things you now turn away from. For long He has held His arm raised above you, but He is slow to strike, because He pities a prince who has been all his life surrounded by flatterers and because, moreover, your enemies are also His.

Next comes a passage which, could Louis have seen it, would have caused him more discomfort than all the rest. Fénelon exhorts him to humiliation and denounces the vice which more than any other marked the latter part of his reign, the hypocrisy which had come over the Court. He says:

> You do not love God; even when you fear Him it is only with a servile fear; it is hell and not God that you are afraid of. Your religion consists only of superstitions, of petty superficial practices.... You are scrupulous about trifles, and yet your heart is hardened against terrible evils. You only love your own glory and your own comfort. You think everything centres round you as if you were the God of the earth and all the rest had been created only to be sacrificed to you. Whereas you were placed on this earth by God only for your people. But alas! you do not understand these truths; how should you appreciate them?

But we must resist the temptation to quote any more from this letter. As political theory its value is *nil*; as a picture of the evils of despotism it is incomparable. As we have said before, one does not look in Fénelon for vast constructive schemes. He has not, like Bossuet, a complete watertight theory of State;

he sees the evils, denounces them, and when the time comes suggests the remedies.

It was when Fénelon's star seemed in the ascendant, when the wonderful effect he was producing on the Duke of Burgundy was evoking the admiration of all Frenchmen and had to be admitted even by prejudiced observers, when his credit at Court stood high, when he had obtained a high reputation as a director of souls, when he was engaged in a little spiritual flirtation with Mme de Maintenon, and when, too, to crown his success, he had been granted the rich bishopric of Cambrai, with the title of Archevêque Duc de Cambrai and an income of two hundred thousand livres, keeping at the same time his tutorship—it was just at this very moment, in 1697, that the crash came for Fénelon and that he was exiled—that is, confined to his diocese, where he remained till his death. It would take us far outside the limits of this article to explain the causes of the quarrel which brought about his downfall. The seeds of it had been sown some years earlier, when he had been won over by the mystical doctrines of a Mme Guyon. Called upon to retract certain of these, and to accept the doctrines of Christianity as set out by Bossuet and two other prelates, he refused until he should be formally condemned by the Pope, to whose authority he was ready to submit instantly. Then began what can only be regarded as a most degrading spectacle for the Church. These two great theological athletes, Bossuet and Fénelon, carried their quarrel on to the public arena, the one using all the heavy armoury of ecclesiastical tradition and authority and backed up by the King, the other relying on his own forces alone, lithe, subtle, and agile, and showing a vivacity of intellect which Bossuet admitted almost frightened him. Backwards and forwards they swayed, now a crushing onslaught by Bossuet repelled by a quick thrust from Fénelon, letters and replies, more replies and counter-replies, relations, accounts, reports, refutations, and all this taking place before the public, who regarded it as a highly diverting spectacle. And what was the cause of it all? Merely that Fénelon thought and taught that it was possible to love God with a pure, disinterested love which seeks no reward and claims no salvation for its merits; and that he was either just a little too stubborn (or sincere; it is not always easy to see

which) to go on believing it and at the same time make formal submission, which would have meant peace for himself and have brought the affair to a more edifying termination. As to the real merits of the quarrel, they will never be settled objectively. One is either a Bossuétiste or a Fénelonien. It is a question of temperament.

Fénelon took his disgrace with absolute submission (not that in his heart he was convinced of his evil, but at least he refrained from spreading doctrines which had received the disapproval of the Pope), and his life from now is devoted almost entirely to the care of his diocese. One of the bitterest of his disappointments was to be cut off from his pupil, of whom he had such great hopes, but he was allowed to correspond with him occasionally, and if only for his sake he felt that it was his duty to keep in as close touch as possible with all matters that concerned the well-being of France. These matters took on a very concrete form for him as soon as the Wars of the Spanish Succession began and he found his diocese the centre of activities. Now he saw more clearly than he had ever done the miseries that war brings in its train and the vices it creates, both for the soldiery and the civilians. He saw smiling provinces ravaged or left idle, peasants' homes destroyed or looted, and France really turned, as he had formerly said, into one vast hospital. In a *Mémoire* which he wrote in 1710 he describes once again the deplorable situation of France. Soldiers and subalterns not paid and badly fed, disorders in the army, pillaging for food, the army immobilised through want of provisions, fortresses in bad condition and practically worthless, despair among the population, hospitals full to overflowing, prisoners of war dying, wounded not attended to, soldiers on the point of deserting, horses and vehicles overworked, future harvests ruined, the Intendants cheating the people to fill their own pockets, national bankruptcy imminent, and France becoming the scorn of other nations—such are the things he denounces. And why all this? Simply because there is no real head of affairs.

> When you build a house, although the masons, carpenters, plumbers, joiners, locksmiths, and so on all have their particular job, yet the work as a whole cannot go ahead if there is not one man directing them all to a single end.

It is precisely this lack of co-ordination that is seen in the affairs of the realm.

> If I were to take upon myself the liberty of judging the state of France by what I see of its government on these frontiers, I should conclude that we are only struggling on by a miracle, that it is simply an old broken-down machine just dragging along from the push it once received and which will end by smashing up at the first impact it makes with anything.

There is, then, need for immediate action, but for this action he does not propose the setting up of any particular councils; he pins all his faith once more in an impossible reform of the King.

> The sole glory which Frenchmen can wish their king is that in this extremity he should turn his courage against himself and sacrifice generously everything in order to save the realm with which God has entrusted him. He hasn't even the right to risk it,[1] for he has received it from God, not to expose it to the invasion of enemies, as a thing with which he can do what he pleases, but to govern it like a father and to transmit it as a precious deposit to posterity.

During all this time Fénelon's life was that of a saint. He was venerated far and wide. One biographer says :[2]

> All distinctions of religion and sect, all feelings of hatred or jealousy, which divide nations disappeared in his presence. He was often obliged to have recourse to artifice in order to avoid the honours which the armies of the enemies intended him.

Officers were lodged in his palace, hospitals visited, and the poor and wounded cared for, food and medicine supplied, as well as all the spiritual comfort he could provide. Long after his death the memory of the good Archbishop lingered in the minds of the people of Cambrai.

In 1711 an event occurred which promised to bring Fénelon very soon into the sphere of practical politics. The Dauphin had died in that year, leaving the Duke of Burgundy heir to the throne of Louis XIV, who was now over seventy and getting too weak to hold out much longer against his doctors. All

[1] This is one of the ideas to which Fénelon is constantly recurring, that a king has no right to wage war without the express consent of his subjects.

[2] Cardinal de Bausset, *Histoire de Fénelon*, iv, 11.

eyes were now turned towards the Duke of Burgundy and, of course, to his tutor. Any day now might see him on the throne, and so to prepare for this eventuality, and to get ready a plan of campaign, Fénelon arranged a meeting at Chaulnes, in Picardy, late in the year 1711, with the Duc de Chevreuse, who ever since Fénelon's disgrace had been in correspondence with him. Here they drew up what are known as the *Tables de Chaulnes*, a list of all the reforms to be accomplished in the kingdom on Louis's death. But all hope of reform was shattered when in the next year the Duke of Burgundy died. The blow was the worst Fénelon had yet received. All the plans for the future, all the fair hopes he had settled on his beloved pupil, were gone, and he felt himself for the first time really isolated. " Tous mes liens sont rompus," he says sadly. " Rien ne m'attache plus à la terre." But he resigned himself to God's will, and spent the last two years of his life in the same exercise of charity which had occupied him since his retirement. He even found time to write a little work which is amongst his literary masterpieces, his *Letter on the Occupations of the Academy*, a work worth mentioning here since it contains the germ of the method with which Voltaire was to renew and remodel the study of history. When Voltaire insists, for example, on the importance of making history not merely the study of kings and their conquests, of diplomats and their dealings, of lists of battles, treaties, and accessions, but rather a portrayal of the lives, manners, habits, customs, and costumes of the people who composed the whole nation, he is only repeating Fénelon's remark that

> The most necessary and rarest feature in a historian is that he should know exactly the form of government and the details of the manners of the nation whose history he is writing, for every century. . . . It is a hundred times more important to observe these changes in a whole nation than to note down simply individual facts.

This was the last of his works, and it was in the year that he composed it that he died—the year 1714—at the age of sixty-four.

III

When we turn to consider Fénelon's work as a whole and see what general theories can be extracted from it, it is then that we see his weakness as a politician. Unlike Hobbes or Locke, he has not thrown into the field of political science any of those great and germinal ideas which direct the trend of political thought for a generation or more, nor has he, like Bossuet, presented a reasoned synthesis of a whole system. Although he knew men and understood their passions, and realised the vast difficulties that confront any ruler, yet he was always too prone to place his faith in the moral regeneration of the ruler. For him, all difficulties would vanish if only a king could be formed who would see that his own happiness lay in placing the interests of his subjects above his own. Questions of laws and constitutions would then take a merely secondary place. Further, although he knew his France well, with its large population, its local differences and traditions, he seems always to be prescribing for something resembling one of the small city-states of Greece. He has left, however, both a general theory of government and a particular system applicable to his own country's needs.

The first of these, the general theory, is not given in one of his own writings. It is to be found in a book called *Philosophical Essay on Civil Government*, compiled, as has been already noticed, from conversations of Fénelon (chiefly with the Old Pretender), by a certain Andrew Michael Ramsay, whom Fénelon converted to a religion which had a vague resemblance to Catholicism. M. Chérel has shown that in one or two places Ramsay has given a decided Jacobite twist to certain of his master's ideas, and this naturally makes one a little suspicious as to the rest. Where, however, it can be substantiated by his other works we may regard it as a fair representation of his thought.

For the practical recommendations there are, firstly, the work we have already referred to as the *Tables de Chaulnes* (sometimes known as *Plans de Gouvernement*) and, secondly, a work called *Examen de conscience sur les devoirs de la royauté*, or, to give it the title it received when it was first translated

into English, *Proper Heads of Direction for a King*. It is not known exactly when this work was written; but it was addressed to the Duke of Burgundy at an age when he was presumably old enough to swallow something tougher than *Télémaque*. It was always kept in the Duke of Beauvilliers's possession during Fénelon's lifetime, since it was much too dangerous a document for the Duke of Burgundy to keep himself. He used, however, to consult it and nourish himself with occasional doses of it. Even in 1734 it was considered too terrible a condemnation of Louis XIV's reign to be allowed to see the light, but it was finally published in 1747, when it produced a great stir. In it Fénelon, like a confessor to a penitent, asks the young Duke a series of questions, all of which bear on some particular vice of Louis's government.

> Haven't you sought counsellors who were most disposed to flatter you in your maxims of ambition, vanity, pomp? Have you worked to instruct yourself in all the laws and customs and usages of the kingdom? Have you studied the true form of government of your kingdom? Have you sought to find out, without flattering yourself, what are the limits of your authority? Have you taken care to put down luxury and to stop the ruinous fickleness of fashions?

These are a few of the questions which Fénelon puts.

Let us first see what Fénelon's ideas are on the general theory of government. Reason and justice, he tells us, alike condemn the despotism of kings and the despotism of the multitude. On the first of these points we have sufficiently heard him. On the second he says:

> The despotism of the multitude is a mad and a blind power which often turns against itself. The wisdom of any government, whatever its form, consists in finding a medium between these two frightful extremes in a liberty moderated solely by the authority of the laws.

Unfortunately, however, he gives us no sure way of finding this mean between despotism and anarchy. These two things he admits are the two points between which humanity seems eternally to sway. "Sovereigns jealous of their authority are always desirous of extending it; people passionate for liberty always want to increase it." But it is better, he thinks, to lean towards the side of authority than liberty, it is safer

in the long run, and so, "When the sovereign power is once fixed by fundamental laws in one single man, in a few or in several, one must support its abuses, if one cannot remedy it by means compatible with order" (which is almost what La Bruyère says when, in discussing different forms of government, he declares that "what is most reasonable and safest is to consider the one to which one is born as the best of all and to submit to it"). So, then, no revolutions under any conditions, since no revolution can ever be justified. Instead of revolution a little gentle Fénelonian persuasion is to be applied. Kings are to be warned that unlimited power leads straight to the ruin of their own authority, and that a sudden and violent revolution will one day arrive, and that instead of moderating their authority it will simply destroy it entirely. On the other hand, nations should learn to pity their kings for the vast responsibility entrusted to them; they should learn that kings are, after all, only men with all the weaknesses of men.

As for the origin of authority, Fénelon considers this to be not the result of any contract, but as coming straight from God. A contract can be torn up, ignored, or modified at the will of the contracting parties, and society becomes a prey to anarchy. There is not time to follow all his reasoning on this point, and in any case it savours rather too much of Filmer and of Jacobitism to be taken entirely for Fénelon's own—it seems to be an interpolation of Ramsay's. What one would like to see him work out, but what he leaves unsettled, is the question that if all established authority is legitimate, and consequently sacred, how do you distinguish between right and fact? What is the difference between legitimate right and usurpation, since all that is necessary is for the usurper to have been victorious in order that his right should become a legitimate one? He attempts an answer by telling us that originally political authority was founded on paternity (and he proceeds to give numerous examples); but when the succession comes to an end, or is broken, then where is the foundation of authority? Why, in conquest, answers Fénelon. "An unjust conquest becomes a just one after a long period of years." It seems, then, that it is just a question of years, although Fénelon sets no definite

time-limit. In any case, it appears that old conquerors were always right and new ones are necessarily always wrong. William the Conqueror was right because his conquest has had time to mature, as it were, while William III is wrong because his usurpation is young as yet.

Once authority is established—on a rather shaky basis, one must admit—comes the question of how it should be constituted. What is the best form of government? All of them seem to him equally bad, but he concludes in favour of a pure monarchy moderated by an aristocracy, and this is no doubt Fénelon's real wish for France—to see the king's power limited by a nobility whose functions will be hereditary. The people themselves will have no voice in the government. They will, however, be well looked after, they will be spared vexatious taxation, and they will be consulted before it is a question of undertaking any war towards which they may be asked to contribute. The functions which every member of the state will undertake will depend on his rank, and rank will be regulated solely by birth.

> When employments are regulated according to birth each order of the state applies itself to the work for which nature and providence have destined it according to subordination, without wishing to aspire by ambition to confuse the different ranks. In this way one employs the nobility for work of the mind and the people for work of the body.

In other words, white hands for the nobility and black hands for the people, or, again, God bless the squire and his relations and keep us in our proper stations. It is, perhaps, hardly just to apply English terms to a scheme intended for France, but with its respect for tradition and heredity, and its concern for the welfare of the people, it seems strangely to resemble the English conception of paternal Toryism.

When Fénelon comes to practical politics his scheme seems singularly more liberal in many ways, although in the main it is reactionary, and is based principally on a return to the old constitution of France before this had been perverted and altered by absolutism. The latest historian of the *ancien régime* [1] says that it needs some subtlety to discover

[1] G. Pagès, *La Monarchie d'ancien régime en France.*

any new ideas in Fénelon, but even without looking for new ideas one can still find a sufficient number of sensible suggestions in the *Tables de Chaulnes* and elsewhere to justify Fénelon against the reproach, first made by Louis XIV and subsequently repeated by many others, of having been nothing but a chimerical politician. He saw that what was ruining France was excessive centralisation. He saw that authority should be taken away from men who were but the fawning flatterers of Louis and placed in the hands of men of integrity. The first of the *Tables* deals with the army, and names the officers whose services could be dispensed with and those who are of tried worth. The next deals with expenses at Court and recommends an immediate and severe retrenchment. All unnecessary pensions are to be suppressed, strict moderation is to be observed in furniture, clothes, food, and an exact account is to be kept of the king's necessary expenses. Next the relations between the temporal and spiritual authorities are dealt with, and here there are some wise and liberal recommendations as to civil toleration. In the section on justice Fénelon insists on the instant abolition of the venality of offices, perhaps one of the greatest vices of all in the administration of Louis XIV. On the question of freedom of trade Fénelon also shows a liberal mind and a good grasp of economics (and from the great respect with which he was treated by the Physiocrats one may gather that his teachings in this connexion were not altogether without fruit). It is, however, in the sections on interior administration and on nobility that the most important of his suggestions are made. He proposes first that there shall be set up in every diocese what are called *assiettes*, or small assemblies, composed of the bishop, the nobles of the district, and members of the Third Estate, who together will draw up the amount of taxes to be levied according to the surveys. All these *assiettes* are to be subordinated to the Provincial Estates. These latter—of which there will be one for each province—are composed of deputies of the three estates of each diocese, and it is their duty to allot the funds gathered. They are to take account, too, of any representations put forward by deputies of the *assiettes*, to consider them on their merits, and to fix the amount of taxes to be paid according to the natural wealth

of the districts and to the extent to which trade flourishes in them. This measure was evidently intended as a blow at the unscrupulous tyranny of the Intendants, who bled the people unmercifully, and at the excessive centralisation and bureaucracy of the monarchy. By restoring a considerable measure of local autonomy it would have represented a decided step forward in the direction of a fairer and a saner administration, since it would have suppressed all farming out of taxes. Fénelon proposed thirdly the re-establishment of the States-General. This body is to be composed of three members per diocese: the bishop, one member elected by the nobility, and one by the Third Estate (and in this connexion he mentions that all elections are to be free, and that there are to be no recommendations capable of being construed into orders from the king). Its members are to meet every three years, for as long as is considered necessary. They will revise the accounts of the Provincial Assemblies and deliberate as to the funds to be raised for any extraordinary expenses. Moreover, they have a right to put forward representations and remonstrances on any points of justice, finance, war, alliances, peace negotiations, agriculture, trade, and so forth; they have the power to punish any violent nobles, to see that all abusive privileges, *lettres de cachet*, and so on, are abolished, that no land is left uncultivated, and that no lands and crops are spoilt by the sporting depredations of nobles. If these are not new ideas they embody, at any rate, many of the points which men were asking for on the eve of the Revolution.

In the chapter on the nobility one sees that it is principally on the restoration of this body that Fénelon's hopes for the future depend. Here he is both conservative and progressive. Although he is anxious to make them a closed caste, yet at the same time he wishes to extend their sphere of usefulness. He wants to see a complete and accurate list of all nobles drawn up and the order of precedence among them scrupulously observed. He is particularly anxious to prevent them from contracting any *mésalliance*, or entering into any union which would bring discredit on them as a class. New blood will be admitted into the nobility, but very gradually, and even then admission will only be the reward for signal services rendered

to the State. This same idea is also put forward in *Télémaque*. A great and noble action, he there advocates, will not be rewarded with an immediate peerage, but it will be the beginning of nobility for a family—presumably if the descendants of a man who has served the State well show that they are worthy of their father they will move up just one step, their descendants, if also worthy, will move up one step more, and so on, so that a peerage may be the result of several generations of continuous virtue and service. It is worth noticing, however, that privileges accorded to the nobility will be purely honorific, nor will nobles any more than other people be exempt from taxation. But, on the other hand, they will be allowed, without losing any of their prestige or dignity, not only to enter the magistrature, but also to engage in trade. (It is curious that twenty years later Voltaire points out the existence of a similar feature in the English aristocracy with the air of one making a discovery.)

IV

While it may be true to say, with M. Urbain,[1] that the influence of Fénelon on the development of political ideas was not profound, the fact remains, nevertheless, that throughout the eighteenth century his name exercised an extraordinary prestige in this domain. On the very eve of the cataclysm itself there were not lacking men who still thought that France's problems could be solved on the lines laid down by the gentle Archbishop. It is almost touching to read in a pamphlet[2] written in 1791 appeals to king, nobles, and people to remodel themselves according to the Fénelonian ideal:

> Puissiez-vous, ô roi! lorsque le retour de la félicité publique fera disparaître les systèmes actuels qui font notre malheur commun, attacher chaque seigneur à sa terre, à son habitation rurale par des charmes et des distinctions flatteuses à l'amour-propre, qui ne pèsent pas sur l'innocent habitant des campagnes; puissiez-vous en faire autant de protecteurs du peuple qui les cultive, faire naître et cimenter leur confiance et leur amitié réciproques.

[1] Introduction to *Fénelon—Écrits et lettres politiques*, p. 26.

[2] *Exposé de la nouvelle constitution de la nation française. Mis sous les yeux du Roi*, 1791. *Par un ancien ministre.*

The simplicity and virtue preconised by Fénelon are also touchingly extolled:

> Les mœurs, les mœurs sont seules capables de faire renaître les vertus. La campagne a ses charmes, ils obtiendraient facilement la préférence sur la résidence des villes, si le souverain, premier censeur de l'empire, prenait la peine de veiller aux mœurs, d'écarter la débauche en la frappant d'infamie, de faire disparaître sévèrement les écrits corrupteurs et les spectacles indécents plus corrupteurs encore. L'éducation d'un grand peuple est tout ce qui le forme. O Roi! Formez des élèves et des sujets soumis, ils seront incapables d'ébranler votre couronne et d'ambitionner comme leurs pères, le mélange de conditions.

Finally the pious hope is expressed that Louis XVI may yet be able to transform France into a Salente:

> Qu'un roi serait heureux si, prenant goût à notre Télémaque, il voulait fortement suivre ses maximes dans l'administration de ses états, dans le choix de ses ministres, dans la formation de ses conseils! Le fils d'Ulysse, Sésostris, Idoménée, rempliraient ses loisirs et son cœur et l'austère Mentor, le vertueux Fénelon, lui dicterait de ces décrets bien capables de faire le bonheur d'un grand peuple que nos décrets nouveaux ont soulevé et si audacieusement égaré. *Télémaque*, livre rempli de sagesse, écrit pour l'héritier de la France, pour le bisaïeul de notre Louis XVI, soyez la Bible politique de notre auguste roi. Tu reverras Ithaque, O Louis, si tu sais vaincre tes malheurs sans te laisser entraîner au torrent; le véritable Français plaint ton sort et ta gloire montera jusqu'aux astres!

Such counsels could only sound, in 1791, like dreams of an unattainable Arcadia. The time was past for gradual and pacific reform. This, however, can at least be conjectured: that had it been possible to apply Fénelon's ideas in his own lifetime, and had the Duke of Burgundy lived to put them into practice, constantly helped and guided by his tutor, there is just a possibility that the Revolution, even if it could not have been prevented, might have taken on a less sanguinary character. Kings might perhaps have learned to respect the limits of their authority, nobles, perhaps, have realised their responsibilities, and the people, perhaps, have recognised that if they looked after their duties their rights would look after themselves. But it is a big 'perhaps.'

R. A. Jones

FÉNELON

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IV

THE ABBÉ DE SAINT-PIERRE

IT is well that one study in this series should be devoted to the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. Of course he does not stand on equal terms with many other writers of the Age of Reason—with Bossuet and Fénelon, or with Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau. His social and political ideas did not attract the same amount of interest. Neither was he so popular. But while I am careful not to overestimate his importance, I also feel that we often know too little of his work. Am I wrong in suspecting that we often know but his name coupled with the title of a curious book, *Projet de paix perpétuelle?* Perhaps we also vaguely remember that the Abbé was a very attractive personality, an idealist, a prophet, but a gentle prophet, a man who did not feel at home in the eighteenth century and had the misfortune to live two hundred years before his own time. Such an impression is partly misleading. Saint-Pierre truly belongs to his age. He is even a typical representative of the Age of Reason, a member of that group of writers who filled the gap between the century of Louis XIV and the days of the "Philosopher." In that period he lived with Saint-Simon, who disliked him cordially, with Fontenelle, who was his intimate friend, with Bayle, who stood apart. But of all of them Saint-Pierre alone needs to be considered by himself. You are quite able to approach Saint-Simon through Fénelon and Bossuet, or Fontenelle and Bayle through Voltaire. Saint-Pierre, on the contrary, stands aloof, and it is one more reason for choosing him as the one representative of a period of transition.

He was born in 1658—three years before the death of Mazarin—at the castle of Saint-Pierre, which stands in the parish of Saint-Pierre l'Église, in Normandy, not very far from Cherbourg. The son of a Baron de Saint-Pierre, "grand

bailli du Cotentin," he belonged—notwithstanding what Saint-Simon said—to a family of genuine and old nobility. He was but six years old when his mother died. Mme de Saint-Pierre must have been a charming lady, whose portrait was once sketched by Saint-Évremond under the queer title *Idée d'une femme qui ne se trouve point et qui ne se trouvera iamais*, which means, I believe, "Portrait of an ideal lady never to be found." We are entitled to suppose that from such an ideal lady Saint-Pierre inherited his attractive personality.

While his eldest brother, who was later on made Marquis de Saint-Pierre, pursued the career of all noblemen, the Abbé entered the Church. With this career in view he was educated at Caen by the Jesuits, who taught him first Latin and afterwards theology. The discipline of classics had no strong influence on his mind, and he objected still more to the training in theology. While we know that he was ordained a priest, we remain in doubt whether he ever sincerely submitted to the teaching of the Church.

The moment his education was over, in 1680, he hastened to Paris, where he immediately started a new course of study. From the Abbé Bourdelot and other famous physicians he was eager to acquire a knowledge of physics and medical science. He had inherited sufficient means to live an independent life. He used them not to play his part in the brilliant world of Versailles, but to cultivate his mind. This, however, he never did in solitude. Indeed, Saint-Pierre was never satisfied with the company of his books alone. He persuaded two college friends to come with him to Paris, and at Bourdelot's lectures he met Fontenelle, with whom he concluded a lifelong friendship. He took a small house in the upper part of the Rue Saint-Jacques, where the four friends settled down, and a fifth, Malebranche, was a frequent caller. Each of them set to work to write a book. While Fontenelle was composing pastorals Saint-Pierre quickly turned from physics and medicine to morals, and sought to discover the best means to increase the felicity of mankind.

Was he carried away on a wave of naïve optimism? He was well aware of the difficulty of his task, but he yet believed that statesmen need the advice of political writers. He first

asked himself what qualities a writer on social ethics must possess. The answer was, a sound, prudent mind, a docile mind, ready to hear what other people say. This does not sound like bold idealism. Saint-Pierre believed that he possessed such qualities. Also he quickly discovered that a political writer cannot remain sitting in his library. In order to see more of the social world he gave up his quiet house and took furnished rooms, so that he could frequently move from one part of the city to another and get acquaintance with many people of various types.

We have a description of his wanderings in the Parisian world. La Bruyère once wrote a devastating portrait of Saint-Pierre:

> Je le connais d'une visite qu'il m'a rendue sans me connaître. Il prie des gens qu'il ne connaît point de le mener chez d'autres dont il n'est pas connu. . . . Il s'insinue dans un cercle de personnes respectables et qui ne savent quel il est, et là, sans attendre qu'on l'interroge ni sans sentir qu'il interrompt, il parle et souvent et ridiculement. . . . Il est là précisément celui dont la multitude rit et qui seul est grave et ne rit point.[1]

La Bruyère's sarcastic remarks are no doubt unfair. It is not likely that Saint-Pierre made such a fool of himself, as this was the time when he won quite an astonishing success. But he owed much to Fontenelle, who was a brilliant speaker in society and generously patronised his friend.

He first introduced him to the Marquise de Lambert, who presided over one of the most fashionable *salons*, and if Saint-Pierre was not regarded as an entertaining guest at her dinner-parties he took an active part in the more serious discussions that went on in the afternoons.

The Marquise was always much interested in the elections to the French Academy. Candidates were eager to win her support, and it was owing to her assistance that Saint-Pierre in 1694 was admitted to the celebrated Company. He had not yet published a single volume, but was a well-known personality in literary circles, and, last but not least, he was a friend of Fontenelle. In the famous battle against the admirers of Greece and Rome Fontenelle stood as leader of

[1] La Bruyère, *Caractères* (ed. Renouard), vol. ii, p. 48.

the modernists, and was thus able to persuade his party to vote for the Abbé. Saint-Pierre does not appear to have taken later on an active part in the contest. But he took a keen interest in the framing of the famous *Dictionnaire*, and had quite a number of activities (such as a criticism of the best authors) that he wanted the Company to undertake.

In the same period he met with another piece of good luck. He was appointed a chaplain to the Duchess of Orleans, the well-known *princesse palatine*, and was thus enabled to witness the life of the French Court during the last years of Louis XIV. Owing to the Duchess's protection he was appointed Abbé de Tiron (Eure et Loir), a post which brought a substantial addition to his annual income. Finally Saint-Pierre was chosen by one of his colleagues in the French Academy, the Abbé de Polignac, to act as one of the French delegates to the peace conference at Utrecht. Hence just at the time when he was writing his book on perpetual peace he was fortunate enough to attend a great diplomatic congress.

Here, however, the Abbé's good fortune came to an unexpected end. The later part of his life was by no means successful.

In 1718 he got into serious trouble because one of his books contained a severe criticism of the late king. He openly regretted that Louis XIV had not applied his enormous power to domestic reform and economic welfare. The French Academy was indignant. It was scandalous for a member of the Company to express such opinions on their illustrious patron. The more indignant were the Abbé (now Cardinal) de Polignac and the Bishop (later on Cardinal) of Fleury. Saint-Pierre was not allowed to defend himself, not even to apologise. He was simply turned out, and could no longer take part in the activities of the Academy.

He found some compensation by joining a newly established society known as the Club de l'Entresol. This group of writers interested in all branches of human knowledge was holding informal meetings in a room on the lower storey of the Louvre. News was exchanged. Papers were read and discussed. Here it was possible to express opinions on current topics. Montesquieu, d'Argenson, and other noted

men took part in the debates, and once the British ambassador Horace Walpole came to lecture on the Anglo-French alliance. Saint-Pierre outrivalled all his colleagues by the number of papers he poured out at the meetings.

But his activity once more brought misfortune on himself and on the society. In 1731 Fleury, who had now become the all-powerful Minister, decided that political debates could no longer be permitted. He was very suspicious of the Abbé, whom he termed "a poor and disastrous politician." He wrote a letter to him, stating that politics could no longer be discussed. "Supposing," he said, "that members would find it convenient to hold further meetings, they must be careful not to give reason for complaint." The members did not find it convenient, and the Abbé was left to himself.

He had only one more opportunity for social intercourse open to him, and that was to join weekly gatherings in the *salons* of famous ladies, Mme de Tencin, Mme Geoffrin. Saint-Pierre was a frequent caller. Now quite an old man, he often remained silent, except when he got too much interested in the subject open to discussion. The ladies were always afraid that he would on such occasions go on speaking for ever. They were careful to keep him within bounds, and the Abbé was aware of it. Witness the charming reply he once made to Mme Geoffrin's compliment: "Madame, je ne suis qu'un mauvais instrument dont vous avez bien joué." But no lady succeeded in making the Abbé so comfortable and happy as did Mme Dupin, the brilliant young wife of a prosperous financier. She always insisted on having 'her' *abbé* present. She took him to her beautiful country house of Chenonceaux, and we have a glimpse of him—now seventy-eight years of age—walking with Mme Dupin—she was twenty-eight—in the park when they came across the tutor of Dupin's son, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau undertook to rewrite and summarise Saint-Pierre's enormous works in order to make them more accessible.

To the last the Abbé was anxious that all the useful schemes that had passed in his mind should be better known. He decided to compress the essential points in a few pages. This was his ultimate work. Just when it was com-

pleted the end came very suddenly. He died on April 29, 1743.

I cannot here describe all the schemes invented by Saint-Pierre, and I only propose to explain briefly what reforms he wanted to introduce into the domestic government of France —in her system of taxation—and finally for the establishment of ' perpetual peace.'

His suggested reform of domestic government is outlined in his *Discours sur la polysynodie*, published in 1718—the one that led to his expulsion from the French Academy. As the title indicates, his proposal consists in the creation of councils or boards in place of the individual ministers: the four Secretaries of State and the *Contrôleur-Général*. The proposal had nothing very striking by itself. Indeed, the Duke of Orleans, who was holding the regency during the childhood of Louis XV, had already attempted a similar reform, following the advice of his friend Saint-Simon. But Saint-Simon's real aim was reaction against the policy of the late king in so far as the nobility had been excluded from taking part in the government. France he wanted to place under aristocratic control. Saint-Pierre's reform is quite different, because he wanted elected councils. The first step would be the forming of three companies of political students, to be chosen respectively in the clergy, the nobility, and the *tiers-état*. From those companies the king would then appoint the forty members of a political academy, to act not only as adviser and promoter of political reforms, but as an electoral body. To the academy was ascribed the choice of the various officials in central and local administration, and those in turn would form by co-optation the ministerial councils.

Whether such a system would work is very doubtful. Indeed, it came at the wrong time, when the Regent, disgusted by the impotence of his aristocratic councils, decided to restore the Ministers of his predecessor. But it is interesting because of its revolutionary content. It is equivalent to a constitutional monarchy based on knowledge of experts.

Another consequence of its adoption would be to correct

one of the main defects of the old government—namely, the venality of offices.

Saint-Pierre showed the same acute vision and much more success in his proposals for financial reform. These are contained in his *Mémoire sur l'établissement de la taille proportionnelle* (1717). A great proportion of the annual income in France was provided by a direct tax known as the *taille*. In the South of France it was a *taille réelle* in the form of a land-tax. But in the rest of the kingdom the *taille* was *personnelle*, and depended on the general income of all those who were submitted to taxation, excluding, of course, the clergy and nobility. To estimate that income no proper method was used. The king simply fixed the total sum to be raised each year and the quota to be paid by each province. In the same way the Intendant made the allotment between the parishes, where collectors elected in the area made the individual assessment. The whole system was most unequal and unfair. But no serious reform had ever been attempted.

Saint-Pierre's proposal appears very simple to our mind, but it was quite a bold innovation. He first requested from the tax-payers a declaration of their income. He next drafted a list of seventeen different sources of income with a *tarif* applied to each of them. He finally proposed the creation of permanent officials to act in place of the elected collectors.

We are now able to see that Saint-Pierre had in mind a modern income-tax with a number of schedules. A great change, indeed.

It is quite surprising that this was of all Saint-Pierre's reforms the only one that was at least partly accomplished. In 1732 Orry, a rough and ready but honest and able Minister of Finance, decided to give it a trial. In several provinces the result was successful enough to arouse a great interest. France, however, was not in a position to pursue for a long time continuous experiments. But in one province at least the *taille proportionnelle* was preserved.

Turgot, who was Intendant of Limousin, took great trouble to put the system into operation, and it was largely owing to the success he obtained that Turgot increased his reputation and later on was called to the Ministry.

I now come to the pet scheme of the Abbé's brain, the only one which outlived him and carried his name to the present time, the famous *Projet de paix perpétuelle*. To the present reader the work is rather disappointing. It is very long and confusing. Indeed, Saint-Pierre was too ambitious when he presumed that his work would be used as a text-book in schools. Peace, according to his view, could easily be obtained if only the European Powers would agree to sign a treaty in five articles. The parties to such a treaty were to conclude a perpetual and universal alliance. They were to accept and guarantee the existing frontiers and treaties. They were no longer to have recourse to war. Disputes were to be settled by arbitration of a court of twenty members, where each of the twenty European Powers should have one seat and not more than one vote. Decisions were to be made by three-fourth majorities. If challenged by one party, the other allied Powers should undertake to carry the sentence by force. They must accordingly provide the league with all that might be required for its expenses and security.

Saint-Pierre's project, it is evident, came very near what the modern world has undertaken to do. He foresaw general renunciation of war and a league of states for the purpose of arbitration, with the preliminary acceptance of existing frontiers. But Saint-Pierre certainly did not realise the delicate problems involved in his scheme. Having drafted his treaty, he addressed himself to each of the European Powers in order to show how great would be the profit that each of them would derive from such a treaty. To George I, for instance, he explained that it would be a complete safeguard of the Hanoverian dynasty. Louis XV would be at liberty to develop enormously the wealth of his kingdom, where letters and arts might flourish. So great would be the advantage of peace that no prince would hesitate to declare himself satisfied with the territories he already possessed.

At the same time Saint-Pierre did not seem aware that it might be impossible to reconcile with his new system the treaties previously concluded. He also assumed that all the princes would agree to stand on equal terms in the league—a very bold assumption. He was at pains to outline prin-

ciples of law that might guide the court of arbitration; he drafted, to use his own words, "rules to distinguish right and wrong in international affairs." But of course he was not yet able to form a distinct body of international law. Finally, he made no attempt to state precisely how the league would be able to enforce its decisions. It is therefore not surprising that the princes and statesmen of the eighteenth century refused to take the Abbé's scheme seriously. Frederick the Great remarked that only one preliminary condition was lacking—namely, the consent of Europe. Fleury's advice was first to send missionaries to prepare the minds and hearts of princes to accept the new creed. Even the enlightened spirits of the age remained also sceptical. Voltaire declared that peace was no more possible for men than it was for savage beasts. Leibnitz observed that the words 'perpetual peace' were at present only to be found in churchyards, as only the dead can preserve peace.

We are no longer entitled to dismiss with a sneer the Abbé's dreams, for part of them are now becoming a reality. We must admit that Saint-Pierre foreshadowed our League of Nations. It is true that he was not the only prophet. In the eighteenth century two other writers in a similar way attacked the problem of peace. But while Bentham and Kant, perhaps, better succeeded in their analysis of the preliminary conditions required for the grounding of a league—such as reduction of armaments—Saint-Pierre remains the one who gave the best description of the league itself. But he certainly failed to understand the whole of the problem. He was satisfied with vague remarks as to the possible use of force. He does not see that some delicate procedure must be found to allow the Great Powers to undertake their due share of responsibility while at the same time safeguarding the independence of the smaller members. He proved a strong realist in his assumption that existing frontiers could for ever be maintained.

All this and all the other reforms he was interested in remind us that Saint-Pierre lived in the eighteenth century. Had he lived at the present time I am not certain that he would have found himself more at home. To me it seems more likely that his ingenious brain would again have worked

in outlining schemes and dreams whose merits we probably should fail to understand. Let us therefore consider Saint-Pierre, above all, as a reformer, and say that, as a reformer, he contributed to make interesting and attractive the Age of Reason.

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N.B.—There is only one reliable work on Saint-Pierre—namely, that of J. Drouet, to which I am much indebted.—P. V.

V

MONTESQUIEU

MONTESQUIEU'S is so great a name, and his work has had so great an influence in and outside of Europe, that it may be approached from many points. It is of first-rate importance for the central problems of political theory, and a recent writer has treated of it as marking " the passing of the idea of social contract." It had the most important influence on the construction of the constitution of the United States of America, and through that channel secretly but immensely widened the influence of the political principles of the English Constitution. It marks the beginning of the serious study of the mediæval origins of France. But I have thought that it would be more in keeping with the general idea of the series, of which my article forms a part, if I were to think of Montesquieu primarily in relation to the problems of his own country and his own time, as a critic and interpreter of the *ancien régime*, and as a forerunner of the Revolution.

It is important, therefore, to note some points from his very little known biography. He was a President of the Parlement of Bordeaux, the first of the provincial *parlements* of France. Its members claimed the right of sitting in the Parlement of Paris, though this claim was never conceded by the metropolitan *parlement*. The traces of the ' parlementarian ' are always plain in Montesquieu's writings, in spite of his wide historical survey and his claim to a European and even a ' human ' outlook on social problems. It is well, therefore, to recall the double *rôle* played by the *parlements* in the history of France. Down to the end of the sixteenth century they had been the chief instruments by which the central monarchy had advanced its authority against the rival powers of the feudal nobility and the organisation of the Church. It had constantly weakened the judicial powers of the nobility—which were also financial

and administrative powers—by claiming as *cas royaux* questions that they wished to bring before their own courts; and the system of "appels comme d'abus" had had the same effect on the judicial and administrative authority of the Church courts. The centralised absolute monarchy of France in the seventeenth century was the work of the army, the council, and the *parlements* of France; and the *parlements* were in their origin part of the royal council. It was the *parlements*, says M. Hanotaux, which had prevented France from being "broken up into cantons." But with the end of the sixteenth century a change comes over the spirit of their action. They are as determined as ever in the assertion of the claims of the king—that is, of the State—against what was left of feudal justice and ecclesiastical privilege. But they began to assume a curiously independent attitude to the Crown. They were now the only channel through which opposition to the Crown could safely be made; for the members held their positions by hereditary right, and could with difficulty be removed. Richelieu shows in his *Testament politique* a keen sense of the possible dangers to the Throne which may come from their powers and temper; and the period of the Fronde and the last years of Louis XV's reign fully justified his foreboding. Montesquieu thinks of the *parlements* as, before all things, a check on the power of the monarchy, and he vastly exaggerates their popular sympathies.

> These companies are always unpopular [with the kings]. They never approach kings except in order to tell them disagreeable truths; and while a crowd of courtiers are constantly maintaining that the people are happy under their government, the *parlements* come to give the lie to all that flattery, and to lay at the foot of the throne the groans of the people whose representatives they are.

He has written a charming fragment on himself and his character, and from this we may extract a few sentences. He claims a great gift for friendship. He has, he tells us, only lost one friend in his life. "Je suis amoureux de l'amitié." Shyness (*timidité*), he tells us, has been the curse of his whole life. "It seems to throw a cloud over my bodily organs; it binds my tongue; it darkens my thoughts and destroys my powers of expression. I am less subject to these attacks in the presence

of men of wit than before fools." We are not surprised, therefore, to find that he loathed the atmosphere of Courts. "I have never tried to make my fortune by attendance at Court. I have hoped to make it by attending to my estates and by holding all my fortune from the hands of the gods." Nor are we surprised to find what has been for him the way of escape from the troubles of life. "Study has been for me the sovereign remedy against all the disappointments of life. I have never known trouble that an hour's reading would not dissipate." Let us note lastly how universal his outlook is. With the advent of the Revolution nationalism would master France once again and give to Napoleon one of his most powerful instruments of victory; but the intellectual current that preceded the Revolution was, before all things, human, and the following words of Montesquieu are a representative utterance of the age.

> If I knew of something that was useful to myself, but injurious to my family, I would cast it from my mind. If I knew of something which was useful to my family, but not to my country, I would try to forget it. If I knew of something that was useful to my country, but injurious to Europe and the human race, I should regard it as a crime.[1]

But it is time that we turned to his political thought, in which lies all his importance for us. Two features strike us as soon as we begin to read *The Spirit of the Laws*—first, his constant appeal to history, and, secondly, his effort to relate political theory to the physical sciences. Both these features are important, and in both he stands near the beginning of a long development. And yet it is easy to exaggerate the importance of both of them to Montesquieu's political thought.

He has a genuine interest in history; much more genuine than Rousseau's; much wider and more sociological than Voltaire's. And yet his knowledge of history—as was inevitable, for modern history is a creation of the eighteenth century—is narrowly limited. What history does he really know in an adequate way? His book on the *Greatness and Decline of the Romans* is not only a work of noble eloquence and political penetration, but also singularly just in most of its views on the four centuries before and after the Christian era.

[1] *Pensées diverses.*

The early chapters belong to the uncritical period before the publication of Niebuhr's work; and the views of the later Empire reflect the views of "Byzantine decadence" current in the eighteenth century, from which the researches of the last half-century have so happily freed us. But, on the whole, Montesquieu shows a remarkable knowledge and understanding of the history and character of Rome. Of Greece he knows naturally far less. Of the Middle Ages he writes rather as an archæologist than as an historian. He knows French history intimately in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and of course he knows his own century. He is deeply interested in English history, and seems fascinated by its problems; but his views are often as strange as they are interesting. He is fully aware, too, of the wider story of which the histories of even Rome, France, and England form only a small part. Egypt, Persia, and India, China and Japan, the peoples of the tropics and of the Arctic, are always present to his imagination; but the time had not come when their story could be seen in a clear light.

His interest in history, then, is great, but it would be a mistake to regard his political philosophy as really drawn from or dependent upon his knowledge of history. A comparison with Aristotle's *Politics* or the works of Lord Bryce reveals at once all the gulf that separates Montesquieu from the ancient and the modern writer. He uses history for illustration and confirmation of his views, but he does not draw his views primarily from a study of history. It will be well to illustrate his methods from a representative and charming chapter, chosen mainly for its brevity (*L'Esprit des lois*, VIII, 6).

> As democracies are ruined when the people robs the senate, the magistrates, and the judges of their functions, so monarchies fall into decay when the prerogatives of the legal corporations and of the towns are destroyed. In the former case the result is the despotism of all; in the latter the despotism of an individual.
>
> That which ruined the dynasties of Tsin and of Soüi, says a Chinese author, was that, instead of limiting themselves, as former dynasties had done, to a general oversight, which is alone worthy of a sovereign, these princes wanted to govern everything directly by themselves. In these words the Chinese author gives us the cause of the decay of nearly all monarchies.

> For monarchy is ruined when a prince thinks that he shows his power rather by altering the order established than by observing it; when he takes away their natural functions from one set of people to give them arbitrarily to another; and when he follows his fancy rather than his reasoned will. Monarchy is ruined when a prince, referring everything to himself, absorbs the State in his capital, the capital in his Court, and the Court in his own person. Above all, a monarchy is ruined when a prince misunderstands his authority, his position, and the love of his people; and when he no longer sees clearly that a king should always feel himself in safety just as a despot should always feel himself in peril.

Can there be any doubt here that the President of the Parlement of Bordeaux is giving himself the pleasure of speaking his mind about the monarchy of Louis XIV and his successor, and that the anonymous (and perhaps non-existent) Chinese author comes in only as literary decoration? Montesquieu knew quite well, and says elsewhere, that monarchies have often decayed from quite opposite causes to those mentioned.

Nor can we rate very highly the scientific value of his appeal to physical science. His insistence on the importance of physical environment was novel and important. But neither in the form in which he gives it, nor in the slightly changed form in which it appears in the writings of Rousseau, is it satisfactory to modern thought. He handles physical science in a light and cavalier manner, which is strange and almost comic to our generation, which knows so well the pontifical claims of scientific adepts. Note his treatment of England in Chapters 12 and 13 of Book XIV of the *Laws*. I do not think Montesquieu takes his views there very seriously. The philosophers of the eighteenth century were not above a desire to amuse a well as instruct; and in these chapters Montesquieu is surely 'pulling the leg' of his English readers. For what does it amount to? It starts from our climate, which has made, he says, of the English a race prone before all others to suicide. (I do not know if there was any temporary truth in this view that suicide was specially frequent in our island.) I do not quite follow the explanation that he suggests for the national tendency. It is the result of "un défaut de filtration du suc nerveux" which makes not any particular thing, but existence as a whole, insupportable. In the next chapter he discusses the effect of this

on the government. A race so irritable and so unstable (the instability of the English is assumed throughout) would rise instantly against the government if it were vested in the hands of an individual. It is best, then, that such a nation, " which has received from the climate a certain character of impatience which does not allow it to endure long the same condition of things," should be governed by the laws in the abstract, which are not so easy to overthrow. So we may say without much exaggeration that the English Constitution is traced to the London fogs; and there is another passage where the religion of the country is shown to be largely dependent on the same cause.

We will now approach more closely Montesquieu's opinions on the condition of contemporary France, and first we will note his opinions on religious and ecclesiastical affairs. In the intellectual world of France hostility to the power and the doctrines of the Catholic Church was sometimes a passion and sometimes a fashion. I can never feel that it is a passion with Montesquieu. We shall see that his political principles lead naturally up to an independent and powerful Church. But he was a free-thinker, and had little sympathy for the devout life. His books are full of criticism and mockery of the Catholic Church and its ways, and he ascribes to it some evil results on very insufficient evidence. He is sure that the world is being depopulated. He asserts in the *Persian Letters* (113) that there is not in Europe a tenth part of the population that was to be found there in the days of Cæsar; this is " la plus terrible catastrophe qui soit jamais arrivée dans le monde." With this strange conviction in his mind it was inevitable that he should attack the Church which approved of celibacy and the monasteries which seemed its particular stronghold.

He is, like all the writers of the age, passionate in his hatred of cruelty—it is Montesquieu's strongest and perhaps his only passion. It was inevitable, therefore, that he should support religious toleration; and he supports it on sure grounds. Religious persecution has many roots, but one of the strongest has been the view, so generally held, and until the eighteenth century almost unchallenged, that unity of religion was necessary to the political unity of the State. It was this view which had wrecked the efforts to grant religious liberty to the

Huguenots in the sixteenth century; and, while the view prevailed, it was exceedingly difficult to make out a strong case for religious liberty in the abstract. Montesquieu has quite escaped from the obsession of the political value of religious unity. He holds by relativity, in the old literary, pre-Einstein sense. "The names of good, beautiful, noble, great, perfect, are attributes of objects relative to the beings who contemplate them. Keep this principle in your head. It is the sponge which wipes away almost all prejudices." And again: "If we may look at the matter without prejudice, I am inclined to think that it is good for a state to contain several religions." There are, he declares elsewhere, three things entirely incredible—"Papal infallibility, passive obedience, and animal mechanism."

On ecclesiastical politics his outlook is that of a good 'parlementarian,' who holds fast by the principle of national unity and power and distrusts and fears the foreign and ultramontaine power of Rome. He is thoroughly 'Gallican' in his outlook. That is to say, he wished to reduce the authority of Rome to the narrowest limits, retaining between the Church of France and the Church of Rome a somewhat vague communion, recognising the headship of the Pope, but confining it strictly to spiritual matters; ready, as Voltaire phrases it, to kiss the Pope's toe, but determined to bind his hands, and maintaining with the utmost energy the traditional practices and powers of the Church in France. This Gallican sentiment played a larger part than is sometimes recognised in developing the ideas which caused and controlled the great Revolution. Montesquieu is strongly Gallican. "A body," he writes, "whose interests are completely separated from those of the State is a monster; and those who established it threw into society a seed of discord and civil wars." He illustrates this view in characteristic fashion, by references to the history of ancient Egypt, then almost completely unknown; but he is on safer ground when he praises the Romans for having made their priests civil magistrates. With these views on ecclesiastical politics it was inevitable that he should dislike the Jesuits, who in the sixteenth century had stemmed the tide of nationalism, and who were the chief supporters of the idea of a universal and non-national Church, drawing its authority from a source

higher than the will of kings or Parliaments. The temporary overthrow of the Jesuit Order in France and elsewhere in the eighteenth century is closely connected with this conflict between the national and the universal ideals.

Let us notice lastly a characteristic view. In an absolute State—whether it be the absolutism of democracy or of tyranny—there is no place for a Church. But in a monarchy—that is, in the limited and balanced monarchy to which Montesquieu's strong preference is given—the ecclesiastical power is very useful. "What would have become of Spain and Portugal since the loss of their constitution were it not for this power, which is alone capable of checking arbitrary authority? It is always a useful barrier when there is no other." Moreover, he adds with characteristic conservatism, ecclesiastical privileges exist, and that is a good reason for preserving them.

Montesquieu's attitude to the Church and religion does not seem completely thought out. He enunciates principles which might lead him to de Maistre's view of the necessity of a universal Church in the interests of liberty. But I am mainly concerned with the bearing of his philosophy on contemporary French problems. He always treats religion as a department of politics, and it is to his political thought that we must now turn.

His temper is strongly and surprisingly conservative. It is often said—and I think with perfect truth—that the whole volume of French thought in the eighteenth century was subversive in its character; that all tended to great and radical change; and that the established order was practically without defenders. The monarchy had absorbed the State into itself, had repudiated all partnership with nobles or clergy or people; and as a result of its triumph over its rivals it was left without partisans or loyal supporters. There was no thinker who ventured to say that the government of Louis XV was a good type of government; it found in France no defender half so enthusiastic as it found later in England when Burke undertook its championship. But the essential temper of much French thought was conservative. Voltaire was no revolutionary in intention; there is a strong authoritative element in Rousseau; but, above all, Montesquieu professes conservatism as a settled principle. Hear what he says in treating of the Romans:

> When the form of government has been long established and affairs have reached a fixed condition it is almost always prudent to leave them there; because the reasons, often complicated and unknown, which have allowed such a State to subsist will still maintain it; whereas if you change the system you can only remedy the mistakes which are observable in the theory of government, and you will leave others which practice only can discover.[1]

This is sheer diehard Toryism! And he retains this outlook even in his great work. Many passages might be quoted. One must suffice. In *Laws*, V, 11, he writes:

> A monarchy has this great advantage over despotism. Of its very nature there are many orders who have a share in the constitution; and hence the State is more fixed, its constitution more stable, and the position of the Ministers safer.

Note too how anti-military he is. The eighteenth century saw the working of the principle (or rather the instinct; for it was neither a principle nor a system) of the Balance of Power. The states of Europe faced one another in naked rivalry, recognising no law except their own interest, narrowly and blindly interpreted. Frederick the Great foretold Napoleon. Modern phrases had not yet been invented; but the survival of the fittest, the State as power, the will to victory, the State above morality, seem to belong more naturally to that age than to ours. Montesquieu's thought lies quite outside of that vicious circle. He did not live to see more than the first stages of Frederick the Great's career, and it would certainly not have exercised on his imagination the fascination which it had for Voltaire. He has nothing good to say of Louis XIV, and especially condemns him for having aspired to universal dominion. The age of conquest is, he thinks, over. He foresees neither a Frederick nor a Napoleon. But there is a sentence in his *Rome* (Chapter XVI) which would have seemed prophetic to the men of 1813–15:

> If to-day a prince were to ravage Europe (as Charlemagne ravaged it) the nations, driven back into the North with their backs to the very boundaries of the world, would hold fast there until the moment came when they would pour down upon Europe and conquer it a third time.

[1] *Greatness and Decline of the Romans*, Chapter 17.

He preaches passionately the claims of international justice, and thinks that the armies of his time—so small in comparison with what they became later in the century, so minute when compared with those of our time—are a grave menace to civilisation. It is well to hear what he says in *Laws*, XIII, 17:

> A new disease has spread over Europe and has attacked our princes. It induces them to keep on foot an absurd number of troops. It goes on increasing, and is of course contagious, for as soon as one state increases its army the other states increase theirs, so that nothing is gained but the common ruin. Each monarch keeps on foot as large an army as he would want if his people were in danger of being exterminated; and this struggle of all against all is termed peace. Europe is so completely ruined that if private individuals were in the position in which the three richest Powers of this part of the world find themselves to-day they would be reduced to starvation. We are poor though we have at our disposal the wealth and commerce of the whole world, and soon we shall have so many soldiers that, like the Tatars, we shall have nothing but soldiers.

Let us turn from these general ideas to Montesquieu's analysis of the different forms of government and their characteristics. This forms the core of his great book on *The Spirit of the Laws*, and it is round this subject that he groups his most important political thought. He does not follow Plato or Aristotle or any of the ancients in his classification; and his arrangement seems to me far less suggestive than that of Aristotle. Montesquieu has a threefold division too, but in place of the rule of the many or democracy, the rule of the few or aristocracy, the rule of one or monarchy, with their various developments and corruptions, he substitutes a division into (i) the republic, (ii) monarchy, (iii) despotism. The weakness of this arrangement is that it does not sufficiently distinguish between the radically different ideas of democracy and oligarchy, and that it makes the antithesis between monarchy and despotism sharper than it has been in history.

His treatment of the republican form is curious. It is almost utopian. There was hardly anything in the Europe of his own day which he could regard as republican. The republic belonged to the idealised period of the classical world, and it corresponds to a moral and intellectual condition (what the French called *mœurs*) which he despaired of seeing

established in the modern world. A republic, according to Montesquieu, may be a democracy or it may be an aristocracy; its essence is to be found not in its political form, but in the temper that animates it, and that temper he describes by the vague word 'virtue.' He nowhere attempts a definition of virtue, but his meaning is clear from the whole treatment of this branch of his subject. He does not mean self-restraint or the qualities which are indicated in the Ten Commandments, though they may be included. He means public spirit, devotion to the community or the State, the temper in which public service is spontaneous. Dante says of the Florentines of his day, in bitter irony, that at the sight of any public burden they declared themselves ready to undertake it; they cried eagerly "io mi sobbarco." That is the temper without which in Montesquieu's opinion the republic cannot exist; and if that spirit is there it does not much matter whether many or few are admitted to participation in power, whether, that is, the state is a democracy or an oligarchy. By democracy Montesquieu means a state where the whole citizen body rules directly (*en corps*), and not merely through representatives. He finds his examples of this type of state in Athens and in early Rome. He chooses as one great excellence of this form of government a quality which historians have often denied to it—the power, namely, of making a good choice in appointing Ministers or agents. He is not troubled by memories of the treatment of Miltiades and Themistocles; by the stories of Cleon and Alcibiades; by the popular appointments in the Second Punic War; by Marius and Saturninus and Curio. And it should be noted that his praise of democratic appointments is only relative; they are better than royal appointments. The weakness and vice of the latter years of Louis XIV and of the early reign of Louis XV are ever before him; and the preference of these kings during the periods indicated for weak nonentities or for corrupt favourites and their fear of strong and independent Ministers are well known. Aristocracy differs from democracy in that only a part of the citizen body is admitted to the possession of political power. No names are mentioned when the subject is first introduced, but it seems clear that the republic of Venice is much in his mind. Virtue is as necessary to an

aristocracy as it is to a republic; but in addition to the general need of public spirit an aristocracy has, in Montesquieu's opinion, special need of *moderation*. He means moderation in ambition; a willingness to live within the framework of the constitution; and the history of Venice would provide many illustrations of his contention.

As I have said, there is something rather unreal and utopian about the whole treatment of the republican form of government. To re-establish it upon the actual earth a great alteration in human nature would be necessary. The character of treatment alters completely when he comes to speak of monarchy and despotism. By monarchy he means the historic monarchy of France such as it was before it was changed into a despotism by the evil genius of Richelieu and Louvois.[1] The republic may be an idealist's dream; monarchy is the best thing possible in the actual world. He leaves us in no doubt at all as to what he means by monarchy. "Intermediate, subordinate, and dependent powers are of the essence of monarchical government." By these "subordinate powers" he tells us clearly he means the nobility, the clergy, and the tribunals, or legal profession. It is thus the old France that he is describing; not France stamped into uniformity by the strong foot of Richelieu and his successors; but France with its privileged classes, with its feudal and ecclesiastical courts, and its *parlements*; France with the institutions that "our German ancestors" had given it, for Montesquieu does not hesitate to identify the French with the Franks, and does not doubt that the Franks were Germans.

Each form of government rests on a principle, and we have seen that the principle of the republic is virtue. Monarchy is declared to rest on 'honour.' It is rather a baffling word, and it is not easy to be certain what exactly is intended by it. A high self-imposed standard of right, a love of distinction, all that had been bequeathed to Europe by the history or the legend of chivalry seem to be included in the word. It is

[1] The mention of Louvois is curious, but there can be little doubt that Montesquieu is really thinking not of Louvois, but of his great master, Louis XIV. There is often a curious hesitation in Montesquieu to mention names. How often is England alluded to as "a certain country"! France itself is often alluded to, not named. Louis XIV was still a great name, and it is easy to understand that Montesquieu did not care to attack him directly.

something lower than the virtue of public spirit, which animates a republic; but something higher than the pursuit of merely personal advantage.

This monarchy—what we should now, perhaps, call this organic monarchy—appeals to him for many reasons, especially because it is pre-eminently a conservative form of government. He believes, as Lord Acton believed, that political power is always in great danger of being abused; where, therefore, there is power there must also be checks and balances, and these are provided by the tangle of institutions and classes that were to be found in the old monarchy. But even those, in his judgment, were not enough. He suggests the addition of a "dépôt des lois," a sort of 'conservative Senate,' as it would be called in later French history, whose special mission it would be to see that the 'laws'—that is, the constitution—were not infringed. What form should this conservative Senate take? It must not be an aristocratic body, because the nobles are too stupid (so Montesquieu declares frankly). It will have to be a political body, a "corps politique," something, indeed, very like the Parlement of Paris, which claimed that very prerogative and had come in consequence so frequently into collision with the monarchy.

The old monarchy of France had gone, and in its place had come something which he hardly dare name. Where in the actual world could the nearest approach be found to the liberty "which was introduced into Europe by the Goths who destroyed the Roman Empire"? Montesquieu had no doubt as to the answer. England was the country that preserved the greatest traces of the old institutions of Europe. England was the country which had adopted least of the centralised bureaucratic monarchy which was the detestation of Montesquieu. He examined the institutions of England, therefore, with envious admiration.

Allusions to the Constitution of England are scattered up and down *The Spirit of the Laws*, but the most important passages are contained in Book XI. He begins with a definition of political liberty, which he distinguishes from individual liberty. Political liberty, he declares, "is the right of doing all that the laws permit"; if a citizen could do what

they forbid that would not be liberty. Where there is power independent of law there is no liberty, however beneficent may be the action of that power. Liberty is not necessarily to be found in republics; it is only to be found in moderate states. "It is an eternal experience that anyone who possesses power tends to abuse it. . . . In order that power should not be abused it is necessary so to arrange matters that power should be checked by power."

He was certainly right in thinking that he saw in England a series of checks on the central power; but the modern historian cannot accept literally his theory of the "independence of the powers" in eighteenth-century England. "In all states there are three sorts of powers: the legislative power; the executive power in all things which depend on international right; and the executive power in all things which depend on civil law." The next paragraph makes it clear that he means the legislative, the administrative, and the judicial powers in the State. Then follows the most famous sentence in the *Laws*: "If the legislative power is united with the executive power in the hands of one person or of one body of officials there can be no liberty; nor can there be any liberty if the power to judge is not separated from the legislative and executive powers." These principles have been submitted to much criticism. They are in direct conflict with modern ideas of sovereignty; and they certainly do not represent the actual condition of things in England at the time,[1] for the Parliamentary executive was then in rapid process of formation. On the other hand, the independence of the judicature guaranteed by the Bill of Rights was a legitimate pride of the English Constitution, and proved a great safeguard of our liberties. But what I want to emphasise is that Montesquieu valued the separation of the powers because they acted as a check on the power of the government. He values the difficulties that the English Constitution places in the way of rapid and efficient action. He values them because they contradict Richelieu's ideal of rapidity and efficiency. The

[1] England is not mentioned by name in Chapter 5 nor directly in Chapter 6 of Book XI. But there is no doubt that England is meant by the phrase "Il y a aussi une nation dans le monde qui a pour objet direct de sa constitution la liberté politique." And the next chapter is headed "De la Constitution d'Angleterre."

natural result of this system, he says, would be to establish "repose and inaction; but, as by the necessary movement of things they are forced to move, they will be forced to move in harmony." How large a part of the later constitutional history of England may be deduced from the impossibility of establishing harmony between the diverse parts of the Constitution which Montesquieu so admired! For he admires everything that he sees in the English system of government; the system of representation, which even in his time had found its critics and was soon to arouse bitter opposition; its hereditary second chamber; the practice of impeachment, which was already passing away as the Parliamentary executive established itself. Had he penetrated our Constitution more deeply he would probably have admired it less; but he was perfectly right in thinking that it opposed to the action of the central government barriers which were entirely lacking in France.

The influence of Montesquieu on Burke has often been noticed, and the English philosopher has acknowledged his debt to his French predecessor in many places. There is one parallelism which has especially struck me. In the *Reflections on the French Revolution* there is a remarkable passage prophesying the rise of some Napoleon to bring to a close the anarchy of the Revolution.

> In the weakness of one kind of authority and the fluctuation of all the officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some general who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery . . . shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will obey him on his personal account. But the moment in which that event shall happen the person who really commands the army is your master, the master of your king, the master of your assembly, the master of your whole republic.

There is much in this famous passage which recalls Montesquieu. He dwells on the necessity of separating the legislative from the executive of a State.

> The army must depend not on the legislative, but on the executive department of the State. For men naturally take more account of courage than of timidity, of energy than of prudence, of force than of counsel. An army will always despise a senate and will respect its

officers. It will take no account of orders sent down to it by a body composed of individuals whom it regards as cowardly, and therefore unworthy to hold command. As soon, therefore, as the army depends entirely on the legislative body the government becomes military in character.[1]

We must turn to Montesquieu's third type of government —despotism. The republic, we have said, was for him a Utopia; monarchy a historical memory in France still partly preserved across the Channel. But despotism was a detestable reality. I do not think that he ever calls France a despotism; he points rather to the despotisms of the East and of the ancient world; but no one will doubt that he is thinking of the government of France, transformed as it had been by his arch-enemy Richelieu and his successors, who had worked in his spirit.

He pours on the despotisms of the world all the shafts of his wit and the powers of his rhetoric. He does not define the evil thing. It is the unchecked rule of one man; in such a state " l'homme est une créature qui obéit à une créature qui veut." Like the other types of government, despotism has a principle for its base, and that principle is *fear*. There is only one reason for obeying so evil a system, and that is fear of the consequences of resisting. Virtue finds no place in it; honour would be dangerous. The rulers live themselves in perpetual fear. A moderate government may safely relax control; " but in a despotic government if the prince lowers his arm for a moment, if for an instant he is unable to destroy those who hold the chief places, then all is lost. For as the spring of the government is fear, if that is gone there is nothing left to protect the people." Montesquieu had a low opinion of the courtiers of a king. One of the best-known passages in the *Laws* (III, 5) describes " their idleness, their low pride, their desire for wealth without work, their hatred for truth, their flattery, their treason, their perfidy, their breach of all engagements, their contempt for a citizen's duties, their fear of any sign of virtue in the prince, their perpetual ridicule of virtue "; but still they have—what is rather hard to harmonise with so many vicious qualities—a sense of honour. But the servants of a despotism sink lower still. They must not

[1] Book XI, Chapter 6.

criticise; they must not oppose; they must not excuse. "The lot of men is the lot of beasts; instinct, obedience, punishment." A despotism exhausts the resources of the people enslaved by it. Property being in continual danger, the springs of industry and of commerce are destroyed. Peculation becomes universal; usury flourishes; the lands go out of cultivation. There is no peace, though there may be absence of strife, "as in a town that the enemy is on the point of occupying." He sums all up in a chapter of two lines (V, 13): "When the savages of Louisiana desire fruit they cut down the tree at the root and gather it. There you have a despotic government." How is it possible that such a government should exist? Why do not men rise and overthrow it? Montesquieu's answer is that it is the easiest of all forms of government. A moderate government requires skill and good fortune. "A despotic government, on the contrary, is obvious; it is uniform throughout; passion is alone required to establish it, and anyone can provide that."

It is clear that Montesquieu has allowed his pen to run away with him in these violent and sometimes amusing tirades against despotism. He draws examples from Russia, from Turkey, and from the East, but his eyes are always glancing at France and at his *bête noire*, Richelieu. The picture is cruelly unjust if it is applied to the French monarchy of the seventeenth century, and shows no understanding of the causes which led to the establishment of the power of Henry VI and of the work of Louis XIII's great Minister.

We have been considering the political thought of Montesquieu with the coming of the French Revolution present to our minds. Had he any reforms to propose or any suggestions to make which might, perhaps, have avoided a catastrophe the suddenness and violence of which he would have deplored? There is not much of practical suggestion in his books—I put on one side his admirable attacks on slavery and his warm humanity in what concerns judicial procedure. I ask in what way he would have proposed to modify the machine of government and administration. He is certainly no revolutionary; he would not have gone very far in the direction of reform. The watchwords of the Revolution would have exercised over him no very strong attraction. He was full of

the spirit of fraternity in all its wider aspects, but would have found it difficult to accept all Frenchmen as brothers; he would not have welcomed the idea of equality, either as regards political rights, or in property, or completely in relation to the administration of the law; for liberty, as he had himself defined it, he would have professed a wholehearted and genuine enthusiasm. He defends some of the abuses of the *ancien régime*, such as the venality of offices, and he approves of local variations in administrative and judicial methods.

The pre-Revolutionary monarchy of France has more to say for itself than some have thought; it contributed by its traditions and its methods most powerfully to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic reconstruction. The Revolution, which used to seem so huge a violation of historic continuity, seems now an illustration of the permanence of historic forces under the greatest apparent changes. Louis XIV lived in the Convention as clearly as the Tsars live in the Soviet Government of Russia. But however 'accidental' some features of the Revolution may be, the old machine of government was clearly in need of most drastic changes. After the passage of nearly a century and a half we can see some of them clearly. The government must cease to be a thing apart from the nation; the people must be taken into partnership. The system of privilege must be abandoned. Direct collection of taxes must be substituted for the practice of farming them. What has Montesquieu to say on these three points?

He is no democrat. He shows no enthusiasm for the idea of a government drawing its strength from the approval of the people. He dislikes uniformity; he values local variations; the republic one and indivisible would not have appealed to him as an ideal. He does not denounce privilege. He was himself a member of the "noblesse de la robe," and shows no sense of the burdens which the system implied to the common man. The twenty chapters of the thirteenth book give us the clearest idea of Montesquieu's attitude to the economic evils of France. There is no hint here of an attack on privilege; no sense at all of the iniquitous and cruel working of the *taille* and the *gabelle*. Chapter 7 of this book touches very lightly an evil that lies close to the outbreak of the Revolution:

> In the land-tax lists are drawn up in which are inscribed the different classes of property. But it is very difficult to understand these differences, and still more difficult to find people who are not interested in misrepresenting them. . . . But if in general the tax is not excessive, if the people are left with a sufficient amount of money, the injustice to individuals amounts to very little. . . . It does not much matter if a few individuals do not pay enough; their prosperity is always an advantage to the public.[1]

The President of the Parlement of Bordeaux speaks there. The peasants that Rousseau and Arthur Young knew would have had a different tale to tell. The destruction of all these inequalities was one of the first demands of the Revolution, and was consummated in the famous abolition of feudalism on August 4, 1789. But if Montesquieu is not ready for a decisive attack on privilege he has no hesitations about the comparative merits of the direct and the indirect method of the collection of taxes. The method whereby the right of collecting the taxes was sold to a capitalist or to a company of capitalists was a very old one in France, and was probably derived from the traditions of the Roman Empire. It had the advantage of giving the State an immediate supply of money and of simplifying the machinery of government. But it was wasteful in the extreme. The tax-collecting capitalists, whether as individuals or as companies, made huge profits, and the wealth of these men (*traitants* and *partisans*) was a constant exasperation to public opinion. The lawyers of the *parlements* had an old quarrel with the *partisans*, and Montesquieu has no hesitation at all in maintaining that the system of indirect collection (*la ferme*) should be abandoned in favour of the direct (*la régie*). His praise of the direct method grows almost lyrical in its fervour.

> *La régie* is the administration of a good father of a family who collects his revenues in an economic and orderly fashion. By this method the prince has it in his power to increase or diminish the taxes according to his own needs or those of his people. By this method he spares to the State the immense profits of the tax-farmers, who impoverish it in innumerable ways. By this method he spares to the people the spectacle of fortunes suddenly made by their burdens. By this method the money raised passes through few hands; it goes

[1] Book XIII, Chapter 7.

directly to the prince, and in consequence returns more rapidly to the people. By this means the prince spares his people innumerable bad laws which are always demanded from him by the importunate avarice of the tax-farmers. As a man who has money is always master of one who has none, the *traitant* makes himself a tryant even to the prince himself; he does not, indeed, make the laws, but he forces the prince to give him what laws he chooses.[1]

A quarter of a century separated the death of Montesquieu from the outbreak of the French Revolution. In the interval many things happened which would have interested him; some which would have conflicted with his teaching. The career of Frederick of Prussia showed that, in spite of what he had said in his treatise on Rome, a small State could still become a great one, and that it was possible to place more than 1 per cent. of the population in the army without incurring financial ruin. The plague of armies had increased far beyond what it was when he attacked them in the *Laws*. At home the *parlements* had come into sharp conflict with Louis XV, and had been suppressed by him; the spirit of Richelieu had triumphed at the very end of the *ancien régime*. But the triumph was transitory. Louis XVI had undone his predecessor's work, and the *parlements* had come back again and had contributed much to the fermentation which led to the Revolution. Montesquieu's name was still remembered and respected; his political teaching had sunk deep into the minds of men. But other writers more popular in their appeal and more passionate in their views had a larger control of the public mind. Diderot, Rousseau, and Voltaire were in the ascendant.

No one had dreamed of the sort of revolution that actually came; Montesquieu least of all. The irresistible demand for democracy sprang from the situation in France rather than from the teaching of the philosophers. Montesquieu would not have welcomed the declaration of the Rights of Man; he would have deplored the abolition of feudalism, the disappearance of the *parlements*, the substitution of the new and uniform departments for the old historic provinces of France. But in the framing of the constitution he would have seen some of his central principles acted upon. The

[1] Book XIII, Chapter 19.

legislators were actuated by a distrust of the central power which would have seemed to Montesquieu reasonable; and they incorporated into their constitution the principle of the separation of the powers. The practice of the English Constitution had, indeed, changed materially since the publication of *The Spirit of the Laws*, and the control of Parliament over the executive was nearly complete; but the constitution-makers of France were more influenced by Montesquieu's theory than by the experiments of their neighbours. So, while the King of France had the right of appointing his Ministers and making war and peace, he might not draw his Ministers from the members of the Legislative Assembly. Between executive and legislative the only constitutional connexion was afforded by the practice of impeachment. Montesquieu was right in thinking that such an arrangement would tend to check the action of the Government. Monarchy and Assembly pulled in different directions, and both domestic and foreign affairs were in consequence delayed. But the consequences were not those which had been foretold in *The Spirit of the Laws*. There was delay, but not repose. Nor when the "necessary movement of things" forced them into action did they "act in concert." When the King resisted the religious policy of the Assembly, when he vetoed military proposals which they believed necessary to the safety of France, when he seemed slack or traitorous in the defence of the state against the invader, it was not 'inaction' that resulted. Sovereignty, the unity of the State, efficiency, secrecy, and rapidity—the ideals of Richelieu, rather than of Montesquieu—were felt to be demanded by the changing situation. The monarchy fell and the Convention reigned, and the Convention showed no sympathy for Montesquieu's ideals. The legislative controlled the executive through its committees; federalism, so favourably treated in the *Laws*, became a crime. The Republic One and Indivisible—the greatest concentration of power, the nation as an end in itself—these are the ideas of the Convention, and they are the antithesis of what Montesquieu had represented. Nor did his ideas fare any better with Napoleon. "I am the Revolution," he declared; with justice, if we take the second half rather than the first

as being the essence of the Revolution. He might have declared with equal justice that he was Louis XIV and Richelieu. The State as a balance and compromise of powers found no place in his scheme of things.

Montesquieu's essential principles did not, however, disappear from the world. They had already been planted firmly in the constitution of the United States. And, if the modern State attaches a value to sovereignty and unity which Montesquieu would not have sympathised with, it has also given to local government and to freedom of association an extension beyond what would have seemed possible to the author of *The Spirit of the Laws*. In most parts of the European world with the extension of local liberties the State begins to assume something of the character of a federation in which the State acts as umpire rather than as universal controller. In the contest between centralised government and liberty—which is one phase of the conflict between Montesquieu and Richelieu—the philosopher has triumphed as often as the monarchical statesman. It is the task of the modern State to bring the two ideas into harmony.

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VI

VOLTAIRE

THERE is probably no writer in modern times who has revealed himself to mankind with more loquacity than Voltaire. Nor can it be said that anyone has surpassed him in the range and diversity of his interests and the wealth of information he amassed about the world and human life. His energy with the pen was prodigious, his zest for knowledge insatiable, his lack of reserve colossal. His journey through the arts and sciences is strewn with brilliant *aperçus*, penetrating judgments, illuminating observations, all expressed with a lucidity and directness that are the delight and despair of his critics. And yet, in spite of it all, he had one fatal flaw in his mental constitution that weakened his position as a thinker. His mind was discursive and tangential, rather than orderly and concentrated. We look in vain for anything in the nature of a sustained and serious attempt to think things through, or to construct a coherent and systematic view of the subject with which he happens to be dealing.[1] The Time Spirit, that infallible judge of all things human, has set its mark upon him as a clever conversationalist in prose, a fascinating critic of men and institutions, who takes a delight—an almost impish delight—in railing at the contradictions, the foibles, and the follies of all sublunary things. Even his remarkable gift for expression has in some respects told against him; for there are spheres of thought where verbal facility, that suppleness of mind that makes language vibrate like a harp, becomes a positive danger to truth. The flaming imagination, the brilliant wit, may create great literature; but they may be, and indeed often are, much too complicated and delicate instruments for the plain, unvarnished, and often drab expositions demanded by science;

[1] For example, M. Faguet describes the *Essai sur les mœurs* as "un joli chaos."

just as the flashing torrent, with its broken water, its eddies and regurgitations, cannot float a cargo vessel on its bosom, however much it may charm the artistic sense. In short, the literary mind—and Voltaire's was essentially a literary mind—has its grave limitations when it is a question of handling factual problems, or problems involving factual solutions. It lacks patience; it knows nothing of the slow elaborations and steady progression necessary for the building of a great edifice of truth; it moves by jerks; it deals in contrasts and comparisons, in metaphors and similes; and too frequently it reaches its goal on the wings of an explosive epigram or a gorgeously dressed half-truth.

All this is characteristic of Voltaire's work, even at its best, when we shift—as shift we must on this occasion—our standpoint from *belles-lettres* to science.

But there was another constituent element in his genius that may be said also to have militated against his efficacy as a thinker. From the date of his momentous *Hegira* to England, which marks the beginning of 'Voltairism' properly so-called,[1] until his death he was a practical moralist, imbued with a passionate desire to refashion the world according to the dictates of enlightened reason. The various channels into which his genius urged him, his excursions into history, metaphysics, religion, were all subordinated to this prime and self-appointed task. Even his literary gift and love of letters were secondary to his interest in and love for the world of practical affairs and his reforming zeal. He was the greatest publicist of his day, flitting like a stormy petrel across the billows of European politics, now in the light, now in the shade, tendering advice to monarchs, exposing political and social injustices, or defending the cause of hapless victims of tyranny, like the family of Jean Calas. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that, in the scale of values, he placed life above literature, action above contemplation, and right conduct above philosophy. Writing, to him, was merely a means to an end, a vehicle by which his consuming passion for justice might be carried across the

[1] "Voltairism may be said to have begun from the flight of its founder from Paris to London. This . . . was the decisive hegira, from which the philosophy of destruction in a formal shape may be held seriously to date."—LORD MORLEY, *Voltaire*, p. 32.

footlights, converted into motives for action, and transmuted into deeds.[1]

If this be so, it would appear to follow that we cannot expect Voltaire to speak to us like a Hume or a Kant, who elaborated their philosophic speculations in the detached isolation of their studies. All his utterances palpitate with the life of the world and bear the imprint of its haste and bustle. He cannot, even if he would, take a dispassionate view of things; nor can he reach that high Olympian calm in which all truth appears conditional and relative, and justice is meted out to men and institutions with a balanced and careful moderation.[2] He looks at his world with the one-eyed ruthlessness of a Luther—much as the comparison would astonish both of these great men—who saw evils not as foibles to be palliated or excused, but as grim and stark realities to be swept away because they offend the reasonable soul of man. He was no more a great philosopher than Luther was a great theologian. Both were crusaders to the manner born, and as crusaders they must ultimately be judged.

Finally, it should be noted, Voltaire's political thought, such as it is, was on the whole negative rather than positive. The Gospel of Reason, of which he was the greatest paladin of the period, may have been, in the first instance, a constructive agency, opening up a luminous path for erring humanity through the labyrinth of the world, softening and uplifting manners, dissolving the mists of superstition from the nooks and crannies of the soul.[3] But in another aspect it was an instrument of violence and destruction; for the enlightened mind that had squared its conduct with the natural order revealed by reason must inevitably be led, sooner or

[1] *Cf.* the following passages from Lord Morley (*op. cit.*):

"His life was not a mere chapter in a history of literature. He never counted truth a treasure to be hid in a napkin. He made it a perpetual war-cry and emblazoned it on a banner that was many a time rent, but was never out of the field" (p. 5).

Wrongdoing and injustice "went as knives to his heart; he suffered with the victim, and consumed with an active rage against the oppressor" (p. 9).

"The instinct which led him to seek the society of great actors in the real world was essentially a right one" (p. 13).

[2] "He was one of those robust characters to whom doubt was a sickness and intellectual apprehension an impossibility."—Lord Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[3] "La raison consiste à voir toujours les choses comme elles sont" (*Dict. phil.*, art. "Enthousiasme").

later, to bring all institutions to the same test: "La vertu quand elle est éclairée change en paradis l'enfer de ce monde."[1] Thus the Gospel of Reason, in one aspect as gentle as any sucking dove, became in another a mighty weapon for the destruction of the stronghold of unreason; and the wielder of it soon found himself in sharp collision with the vested interests of France, temporal as well as spiritual. It would have been different had the world yielded to the resounding blows Voltaire dealt it. But it needs no philosopher to point out that there are no such surrenders in the political world at the trumpet-call of reason. Those who enjoy them defend them to the last gasp, and the new order can only be constructed on their overthrow. It would be asking too much, then, of one committed, as Voltaire undoubtedly was, to a mortal conflict that he should lay stress on the constructive aspect of his thought, or even that he should indicate the bridge by which humanity might pass, without disaster, from the old dispensation to the new. He was the pioneer, the trail-blazer, whose task it is to level rather than construct; dynamite and the axe are his weapons, and his path is not beautiful to the eye.

Such, then, are some of the limitations of this remarkable man considered as a thinker. It is necessary to recognise them, for they provide a salutary check upon possible exaggeration. But it is even more necessary to realise that they were also the conditions of his greatness as a factor in contemporary life. He saw things clearly, *because* he desired to reform them; he expressed his convictions with incomparable lucidity, *because* he hoped thereby to reach and change the mind of the age; and he himself led the way towards "the Canaan of his desire," *because* he knew that no air-drawn theories or lamp-smelling speculations could inspire his native country with the urge it needed.

It may seem feasible to suppose that any attempt to reconstruct Voltaire's political philosophy should begin with an account of his intellectual ancestry, an analysis of the sources whence he drew his inspiration and material. Emphasis might be laid, for example, on his affiliation with the critical movement that began in France under the clouds overshadowing the later years of Louis XIV's reign: a movement

[1] Voltaire to M. le Chevalier de Richelieu, September 20, 1760.

represented by the names of Fénelon, Saint-Simon, Boulainvilliers, and, above all, Pierre Bayle.[1] Or, again, we might inquire, with still more advantage, into the inheritance bequeathed to him by Newton, Locke, and the English deists; for there is no doubt that England was his spiritual home, and English thought nourished the brawn and sinew he used with such telling effect during his maturity.[2] But an effort of this nature—to ticket, as it were, the intellectual 'furniture' of a great man—is open to more than one grave objection. It tends to obscure his personality, to dissolve him into a series of convergent and divergent influences, the actual assessment of which is extremely difficult, uncertain, and disputable. Moreover, it proceeds on a wrong assumption. Voltaire's mind was not a middleman's store-house, where the thoughts of others are collected and redistributed; if we must have an analogy let it be likened to a laboratory, where the materials used in experiments are passed through processes which give them a new quality and a new significance. The *forte* of the man lay in his unique power of assimilating, focusing, and redirecting the scattered light shed by all manner of studies on the problems of human existence.

Frankly, therefore, we need not concern ourselves with his borrowings and assimilations; our task, as I conceive it, begins where the borrowings and assimilations end, and consists in the portrayal of his mind and thought as they lie reflected in his writings.

An exception, however, must be made with regard to his method; it was the method of experimental science consecrated by more than a century of success in the fields of organic and inorganic nature.[3] Step by step the scientific investigator, working on the hypothesis that nature is a gigantic machine operated by springs and balances, which move in accordance with inflexible laws, had pressed back the frontiers of the unknown, and built up an impressive edifice of demonstrable truth. Such was the work of the seventeenth century. The programme of the eighteenth was to

[1] H. Sée, *Les Idées politiques en France au XVIIIème siècle.*

[2] Lord Morley, *Voltaire*, Chapter II.

[3] Sir Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. i; H. A. Taine, *L'Ancien Régime* (1876), p. 222 *et seq.*

extend this fruitful hypothesis from nature to man, to carry forward the same principle of reasoning, which had dissolved the mysteries of the physical universe, into the still confused region of man's political and social activities. Human nature, it was argued, being a part of the greater Empire of Nature, must fall within the scope of laws as inflexible, as certain in their operation, as those already familiar to the physicist, the anatomist, the biologist.

The actual transference of the hypothesis and the return from the natural to the human world is, of course, associated pre-eminently with the name of Locke, whom Voltaire couples with Newton as the Castor and Pollux of the new dispensation. Just as Newton abolished metaphysics from the realm of physics, and constructed a new universe from observation, experiment, and the interrogation of natural phenomena, so Locke "reduced metaphysics to the experimental physics of the soul." Voltaire's admiration for Locke is unbounded. He says:[1]

> Mr Locke has developed human reason to man just as a skilful anatomist explains the springs and structure of the human body. He begins with an infant at its birth; he follows slowly and cautiously the progress of its understanding; he sees what it has in common with the brutes, and what it has above them. He consults particularly the evidence of his own consciousness.

And again:[2]

> After all, we must admit that anybody who has read Locke must find the Platos mere fine talkers and nothing more. In point of philosophy, a chapter of Locke or Clarke is, compared with the babble of antiquity, what Newton's optics are compared with those of Descartes.

Of course, the justification for the extension of the scientific method to the realm of philosophical speculation lay in the acceptance by the philosopher of a similar hypothesis to that of the scientist with respect to his subject-matter. If the actions of man were to be rationalised, subjected to a rigid system of deduction and induction, and made to yield principles as valid as those established by the researcher into the constitution of matter, there must be discernible in all the

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Locke." [2] Quoted by Morley, p. 49.

operations of human nature a regular and recurring series of phenomena similar to that predictable of the world of nature, or the philosopher would find his foothold sink in a bed of shifting sand. Pursue the matter still farther and it becomes apparent that if human activities are to be taken as constant and regular two conditions must be fulfilled: (i) the mind of man must be the theatre of a uniform play of motive, and (ii) the motives of men in general must be quantitatively and qualitatively the same, at all times and in all places.[1] On no other grounds was it possible, in the Age of Reason, to imagine a science of politics as even a remote contingency.

The clear-sighted Hume, with his customary logic, seized upon the hypothesis and all its attendant implications and gave it a classical exposition in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. But Voltaire was no less an adherent to the doctrine, albeit he did not blazon it on his portals. The variety of the human species does not appal him. The "Lord of nature has peopled and variegated the earth"[2] with bearded Europeans, woolly-headed negroes, straight-haired Orientals, beardless Americans, each with his peculiar physical and mental traits, just as He made the oak to differ from the fir and the fir from the pear-tree.[3] But men are men and trees are trees, notwithstanding. In organs of life, of sense, and of movement, in feeling and desire, men are identical at all times and in all places.[4] A piece of bread, a hut, and a poor dress—"voilà l'homme tel qu'il est d'un bout de l'univers à l'autre."[5] So firmly was Voltaire convinced of this principle that he made it a test for the credibility of witnesses and records, of chroniclers and historians: "Refusons notre créance à tout historien, ancien et moderne, qui nous rapporte des choses contraires à la nature et à la trempe du cœur humain."[6] In fact, the doctrine of human uniformity runs like a deep undertone through all his writings. It is the meridian line to which everything is referred, the first article in his philosophical creed.

[1] J. Goldstein, *Die empiristische Geschichtsauffassung David Humes*.
[2] *Essai sur les mœurs*, c. CXLVI. Voltaire believes in the fixity of species.
[3] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Homme," § "Différentes races d'hommes."
[4] *Essai sur les mœurs*, c. CXLVI.
[5] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Homme," § "De l'Homme dans l'état de pure nature."
[6] Preface to *Charles XII*.

But now that the subject has been broached, so to speak, it becomes difficult to proceed. Although Voltaire was a very prolific writer—his *Œuvres* reach to more than fifty volumes—he never committed himself to a full-length treatise on politics after the manner of Montesquieu and Rousseau. Had he presented the world with a book like the *Esprit des lois* or the *Contrat social* it would have been comparatively easy to fix upon it and say this is the thesis he set out to establish, and this is the way he established it, or failed to establish it. We could follow his reasoning, examine his logic, criticise his conclusions, and perhaps assign him his place in the evolution of political theory. But Voltaire is not to be so entrapped within the covers of a single volume. It might be said of him as was said of a much greater man:

> Others abide our question. Thou art free.

He is the most elusive of writers. Not only did he never write a treatise on politics: he never condescended to think politically for any length of time in a consecutive manner. Had he been taxed with this as a fault he would probably have replied: "My interest lies not in man's relations to the State, but in the whole *ensemble* of his relations—moral, intellectual, and social, as well as political. To separate off, and consider apart, the political aspect of these relations is to commit an abstraction, and I abhor abstractions." Thus the diversity and range of his interests and the essential humanism of his outlook probably prevented Voltaire from becoming a specialist in any one branch of thought. In any case, the consequence is that he who would reconstruct his political ideas is placed in a quandary as to where to find his material.

M. Henri Sée, in his *Idées politiques en France au XVIIIème siècle*, overcomes the difficulty by a simple dragging process, in which he succeeds in landing quite a respectable number of political fish from the ocean of Voltairian thought. But M. Sée's dragnet is wide in the mesh, and one cannot be sure that the fish he has collected are fully representative. On the other hand, the difficulty of using a finer mesh consists in knowing just what to keep and what to throw out. The term 'political thought' is not a clearly defined category even to-day; and in the eighteenth century it was much more

blurred and indefinite. On the whole, therefore, it is safer to allow a wide margin and to follow the author's mind, rather than to adopt a rigid classification and rule out everything that appears to lie beyond it. The result will be not what Voltaire actually asseverated on any particular occasion, or in any particular argument, but it will reflect fairly clearly his mind and method over the topics which he himself considered relevant to the life of man in a civilised community.

Perhaps the most striking general feature of Voltaire's political thought, thus conceived and marshalled, is its insistence upon spiritual values. Just as in his historical works, the *Essai sur les mœurs* and the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, it was his aim to penetrate behind the veil of *événements* on which the chroniclers of his day were accustomed to paint their pictures of the past to the ideas of which the *événements* are merely the outward and visible expression,[1] so also he seeks to penetrate behind the forms in which the political life of man is clothed to the intangible forces which give them a meaning and a value. Here he differs markedly from his contemporaries, who, in virtue of their belief in the uniformity of human nature, are inclined to lay far too much stress on institutions as the source of national well-being and of national differences. Hume's essay entitled *That Politics may be reduced to a Science* is a good example of this type of thinking; so also is the *Esprit des lois*. But Voltaire, although he held identical views as to the constitution of human nature, finds little to interest him in the formal aspect of political life. Inevitably and naturally his mind fixes itself on the animating spirit behind the outward reality. If that spirit is humane and vital his vigilant mind is touched to fine issues; if, on the other hand, it is benumbed and inhuman he is provoked to anger and contempt. One might almost conclude that his motto is contained in the couplet of Pope:[2]

> For forms of government let fools contest;
> Whate'er is best administer'd is best.

Clearly it would be foolish to expect from such a one an authoritative exposition of any constitution or institution. Even his celebrated account of the English Constitution in the

[1] See J. B. Black, *Art of History*, p. 34. [2] *Essay on Man.*

Lettres sur les anglais, a topic in which, like Montesquieu, he was unusually interested, because he regards England as the best-governed country in the world, amounts to little more than the hasty glance of a friendly spectator,[1] intensely alive to our national traits, but lacking an eye for technical detail or machinery. And if Voltaire did not feel himself drawn to a careful analysis of particular constitutions *a fortiori* he was much less interested in that academic debate which froths through the pages of many of his contemporaries, concerning the rival merits of monarchy and democracy as forms of government. He has little to say on the topic, and the little is apt to be perfunctory, platitudinous, or even ironical if the mood so takes him. Thus, in answer to the question "Which form of government is best for a country?" he replies:[2]

> It is a question which has been agitated for four thousand years. Ask the rich and they will tell you an aristocracy; ask the people and they will say a democracy; kings alone prefer royalty. Why, then, is almost the whole earth governed by monarchs? Put that question to the rats who proposed to hang a bell round the cat's neck! In truth, the genuine answer is because men are rarely worthy of governing themselves.

Or take this animated description of monarchy:[3]

> A farmyard exhibits the most perfect representation of a monarchy. There is no king comparable to a cock. If he marches haughtily and fiercely in the midst of his people it is not out of vanity. If the enemy is advancing he does not content himself with issuing an order to his subjects to go and get killed for him, in virtue of his infallible knowledge and resistless power; he goes in person himself, ranges his troops behind him, and fights to the last gasp. If he conquers it is himself who sings the *Te Deum*. In his civil and domestic life there is nothing so gallant, so respectable, and so disinterested. Whenever he has in his royal beak a grain of corn or a grubworm he bestows it on the first of his female subjects that comes within his presence. In short, Solomon in his harem was not to be compared to a cock of the farmyard. If it be true that bees are governed by a queen to whom all her subjects make love that is a more perfect government still.

On the whole, it is not difficult to see where Voltaire's preference lay. His intellectual sympathy was with republicanism

[1] Lord Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
[2] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Pays."
[3] *Ibid.*, "Lois," § III.

and democracy, as the most natural, free, humane, and peaceful type of political association. But considerations of security led him to recognise the monarchical *régime*, provided it was tempered by justice and subject to the law, as the most practicable in the Europe of his day : [1] " Un véritablement bon roi est le plus beau présent que le ciel puisse faire à la terre." [2]

There is another consequence of Voltaire's insistence upon spiritual values, equally negative and important in its effect. He rejected all materialist interpretations of human development as radically false. Believing, as he did, that the motive forces shaping and controlling the destiny of mankind were ideological, that history is the record of ideas, it was inevitable that he should regard any attempt to supersede the conscious activities of man by natural agencies, over which he had no control, as rank heresy. Thus he gives the theory that history can be interpreted by means of geography and climate a very chill reception, albeit there were great names behind it, like Bodin, Fontenelle, Montesquieu. He does not go so far as Hume, who rejects the whole doctrine, bag and baggage, with the atrocious remark : [3]

> The only observation with regard to the difference of men in different climates, on which we can rest any weight, is the vulgar one, that people in the northern regions have a greater inclination to strong liquors, and those in the southern to love and woman.

On the contrary, he admits the influence of geographical conditions on the human organism—its strength and beauty, its aspirations, and to some extent also the character of its genius. He also allows it considerable play in regard to manners and customs. Thus equatorial races are black or brown ; those of temperate latitudes are fair ; the powers of a Newton do not fructify in Africa, nor the strength of a Hercules in Lapland.

[1] " Le grand vice de la démocratie n'est certainement pas la tyrannie et la cruauté " (*Dict. phil.*, art. " Démocratie ").

" Le plus tolérable de tous (*i.e.*, gouvernements) est sans doute le républicain, parce que c'est celui qui rapproche le plus les hommes de l'égalité naturelle " (*Idées républicaines*, § XLI).

" De toutes les républiques la plus petite semblerait devoir être la plus heureuse, quand sa liberté est assûrée par sa situation, et que l'intérêt de ses voisins est de la conserver " (*Idées républicaines*, § XXVI).

[2] *Commentaire sur " L'Esprit des lois,"* *Pensées sur le gouvernement*. *Cf.* also *Les Lois de Minos*, Act V, Scene IV, note by Voltaire.

[3] Essay *Of National Character*.

An Indian bathes in the Ganges as part of his religion; but anyone who should prescribe a bath in the river Dwina for the inhabitants of Archangel would be stoned. Similarly the Arab abstains from pork, because pork breeds leprosy in a hot country; but the Westphalian would be tempted to knock down anyone who prescribed the same abstention for him. All these matters are susceptible, according to Voltaire, of climatic explanations. But the great events of history are on a different plane altogether. Why, he asks, are the Egyptians, who once conquered the world for their pleasure, now the most lazy, frivolous, and cowardly of people? Why is there no longer an Aristotle, an Anacreon, a Zeuxis, at Athens? Whence comes it that Rome, instead of her Ciceros, Catos, Livys, has merely citizens who dare not speak their minds, and a brutalised populace whose supreme happiness consists in having cheap oil and gazing at processions? Climate, says Voltaire, can answer none of these questions; for climate is a constant quantity, dependent upon latitude and longitude and the earth's formation. Time alone provides the clue; "everything is changed in bodies and minds by time." Perhaps, he adds, there will come a time when the Americans will cross the sea to instruct Europeans in the arts![1]

On its positive side the argument is not very convincing; we should want more information as to how time operates as a factor in the fate of peoples and empires before we accept Voltaire's oracular statement. But it would be difficult to find a more convincing and resolute opponent of the materialist heresy that history is the handmaiden to geography. In Voltaire's eyes the ideological development of mankind forms the substance of history, and physical conditions have little to tell us concerning it.

It was in order to understand and expound this ideological development that Voltaire conducted his memorable investigation into world history and wrote his *Essai sur les mœurs*. In Chapter CXCVII of the work he sums up the result of his studies in the following words:

> There are two empires, the Empire of Nature, which unites all men on the basis of certain common principles; the Empire of

[1] Cf. *Dict. phil.*, art. "Climat"; *Essai sur mœurs*, c. CXCVII; *Dict. phil.*, art. "Lois (Esprit de)"; *Commentaire sur "L'Esprit des lois."*

> Custom, which, covering as it does manners and customs, spreads variety through the world. Thus the basis is everywhere the same, and culture produces different fruits.

The contrast which is contained in these words "Empire of Nature" and "Empire of Custom" is an epitome of Voltaire's political philosophy as well as of his philosophy of history; and if we examine it more closely it will take us to the central principles of his political position.

Assuming the uniformity of human nature as a base line, or least common denominator, it ought to be possible, he argues, by deductive reasoning, working on the common stock of qualities, potentialities, and powers which human nature possesses, to build up the elements of a natural order, universally valid—that is, to construct a philosophy embodying natural religion, natural law, and natural rights. Over against this natural order stands the actual world, with its legal codes, its established religions, and its political institutions—the so-called "Empire of Custom." The problem of the political philosopher is to relate these two worlds to each other, to draw the necessary inferences, and to bring the real world into harmony with the principles which reason has discovered in its perambulation of the natural order. This is precisely what Voltaire sets out to do. Believing that the natural order is more ancient, more fundamental, and more vital than the actual order that observation and history reveal, he makes it a kind of Torres Vedras, from which he sallies to deliver blows against the existing institutions of his time, and to which he may return for periods of refreshment and recuperation. Thus natural law becomes the base for his attack on the contradictions and iniquities of established codes of law; natural religion supplies him with powder and shot against Christianity and the Church; and natural rights give him a vantage ground from which to assail the imperfect and maimed rights accorded to the individual under the absolutist *régime* of the age. In short, we find Voltaire a champion of man in his natural setting against all institutions, systems, and doctrines that would denaturalise him and defraud him of his birthright.

His argument on behalf of a natural order appears to run as follows: Man, like the animals, is a creature of instinct,

motioned, like them, to self-preservation and self-propagation, seeking satisfaction for his primary physical needs—"la faim et l'amour."[1] But he differs from them by the possession of a third instinct, which lifts him to a higher plane and marks him down for a more exalted destiny—viz., a feeling of benevolence towards his kind,[2] which gathers him naturally into families and into society. On the strength of this third primary quality, then, Voltaire is enabled to assert the general principle that man is *ab initio* a social being. The facts revealed by history prove it, for "all the races of men whom we have discovered have constantly lived in society."[3] Thus he brushes aside the Hobbesian "state of nature" with its "bellum omnium contra omnes" as false; man in such a state would not be man, but a mere brute, lower than the Iroquois of America, few in number, inarticulate in speech, and void of the knowledge of God.[4] Similarly he denies the legend of a prehistoric Golden Age of virtue and freedom from which society has degraded and depraved him. He remarks:[5]

> Some poor jesters have so abused their understanding as to hazard the astonishing paradox that man is originally created to live alone, and that it is society that has depraved his nature. They might as well say that herrings were created to swim alone in the sea; and that it is by an excess of corruption that they pass in a troop from the frozen ocean to our shores. Just as every animal has its instinct, so the instinct of man, fortified in his case by reason, disposes him towards society as towards eating and drinking. So far from society having degraded him, it is estrangement from society that depraves him.

[1] "La faim et l'amour principe physique pour tous les animaux" (*Pensées, remarques, et observations de Voltaire*).

"Nous sommes gouvernés par l'instinct, comme les chats et les chèvres. C'est encore une ressemblance que nous avons avec les animaux: ressemblance aussi incontestable que celle de notre sang, de nos besoins, des fonctions de notre corps" (*Dict. phil.*, art. "Instinct").

[2] "L'homme n'est pas comme les autres animaux, qui n'ont que l'instinct de l'amour propre et celui de l'accouplement, non seulement il a cet amour propre nécessaire pour sa conservation, mais il a aussi, pour son espèce, une bienveillance naturelle" (*Traité de métaphysique*, c. 8).

[3] "Tous les hommes qu'on a découverts dans les pays les plus incultes et les plus affreux vivent en société" (*Dict. phil.*, art. "Homme").

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

This instinct of benevolence germinates in the human brain *pari passu* with the germination of man's other powers, and asserts itself as a feeling for justice and order. Without it there could be no society at all. "Il n'y aurait eu aucune société, si les hommes n'avaient conçu l'idée de quelque justice."[1] It is not, he assures us, with evident deference to Locke, an innate idea, for "no one is born with the idea that he must be just; but God has so arranged man's organs that as they grow and unfold they make us feel at a certain age all that it is necessary we should feel for the conservation of the species."[2] Society, therefore, is the most natural thing in the world: it is the fulfilment of human nature's instinctive need, the condition of its well-being, the vehicle for its self-realisation.

And what of the Social Contract? There is a contract, Voltaire would say, but it is implicit rather than explicit; a contract which the individual incurs in virtue of his being a member of society, not a contract which precedes his membership. But it is a binding contract none the less, from which there is no escape, because, society being a natural, and therefore divinely appointed, institution, no one may, while he forms a part of it, legitimately incur obligations which place him in a position detrimental to it.[3] In other words, although we do not contract ourselves *in* by a specific act, we cannot contract ourselves *out* unless society permits it. All obligations, therefore, are conditional upon the first and tacit obligation which unites a man to his country and sovereign. If, for example, an individual enters a monastic order, and thereby enters into a new and binding contract, which withdraws him, or threatens to withdraw him, from his natural attachment, he does so under the express assumption that there is no abrogation of the primary vow. Or, as Voltaire puts it,[4] the first vow is to the State; it is a vow

[1] *Philosophe ignorant*, 31–38. *Cf.* also "Nous avons deux sentiments qui sont le fondement de la société : la commisération et la justice" (*Philosophie de l'histoire*, c. 7); also "Il y a une loi naturelle, et elle consiste ni à faire le mal d'autrui ni à s'en réjouir" (*L'A.B.C.*, 4e entretien).

[2] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Juste (du) et de l'injuste."

[3] *Ibid.*, art. "Droits," § III: "Chaque citoyen naît sujet de l'État, et il n'a pas le droit de rompre des engagements naturels envers la société, sans l'aveu de ceux qui la gouvernement."

[4] *Ibid.*

authorised by God, unalterable and imprescriptible. If we take a posterior vow which conflicts with it the second is entirely conditional; and if the sovereign declares it to be incompatible with the welfare of society he does not dissolve this posterior vow, he merely decrees it to be necessarily void, and replaces the individual in his natural state.

Inasmuch, then, as society came into being in response to man's instincts and needs, it follows that it must guarantee to him his natural rights, and protect him in the enjoyment of them. What these rights are Voltaire takes for granted rather than discusses. But we get a glimpse of their substance in a passage dealing with the English Constitution. It runs as follows: [1]

> The English Constitution has, in fact, arrived at the point of excellence, in consequence of which all men are restored to these *natural rights*, which in nearly all monarchies they are deprived of. These rights are entire liberty of person and property; freedom of the Press; the right of being tried in all criminal cases by a jury of independent men—the right of being tried only according to the strict letter of the law; and the right of every man to profess, unmolested, what religion he chooses. . . .

The only limitations which Voltaire appears to set to the exercise of man's natural rights are (i) that they do not trouble public order, and (ii) that they respect the golden rule—" Ne fais pas ce que tu ne voudrais pas qu'on te fît." [2]

He asks: [3]

> Sera-t-il à chaque citoyen de ne croire que sa raison, et de penser ce que cette raison éclairée ou trompée lui dictera? Il le faut bien, pourvu qu'il ne trouble point l'ordre: car il ne dépend pas de l'homme de croire ou de ne pas croire, mais il dépend de lui de respecter les usages de sa patrie.

And again: [4]

> Pour qu'un gouvernement ne soit pas en droit de punir les erreurs des hommes, il est nécessaire que ces erreurs ne soient pas des crimes; elles ne sont des crimes que quand elles troublent la société.

[1] *Lettres sur les anglais*, 8e lettre. *Cf.* also *Dict. phil.*, art. " Gouvernement."
[2] *Traité sur la tolérance*, c. VI.
[3] *Ibid.*, c. XI.
[4] *Ibid.*, c. XVIII.

One so-called right Voltaire does not include in the category of natural rights—the right of equality. With commendable common sense he refused to follow the egalitarian will-o'-the-wisp which his own gifted nation, after his death, pursued with blood and madness for nearly a generation. He admits, of course, that equality appears to be the most natural thing in the world, since all men are obviously equal in the enjoyment of the faculties of their common nature.[1] But functional equality cannot, he says, be made the basis for a general principle of equality, unless we may suppose that nature everywhere offers an easy and bountiful subsistence to mankind, and that mankind is born without wants.[2] Neither condition holds good. Nature is not always bountiful, nor has she created man without a thirst for power, wealth, and pleasure. Hence arise the inequalities in the world. The root of the matter, he continues, is not inequality of possessions; for poverty is not necessarily humiliating: it is the condition of dependence which poverty forces upon the poor that creates bitterness.[3]

Having thus foisted the cause of inequality upon Nature herself, Voltaire is inclined to wash his hands of the whole business, and fall back on the established order. It is a fact, he argues, that the human race, being constituted as it is, cannot exist without an infinite number of useful individuals possessed of no property at all; for most certainly no man in easy circumstances will leave his land to come and cultivate another's.[4] Consequently when anyone comes forward, after the lots have been drawn and the sharing out accomplished, with a request for his equal share of the land surface of the earth, arguing on grounds of natural equality, the answer must be: "The shares are all filled up." If you want your share go and find it among the Samoyeds, the Kafirs, or the Hottentots. But if you want to have food and clothing and lodging among us work for us as your fathers did, serve us, or amuse us, and you will be paid; if not, you will be obliged to turn beggar.[5]

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Égalité." [2] *Ibid.*, § I.

[3] *Ibid.*: "Il importe fort peu que tel homme s'appelle *sa hautesse*, tel autre *sa sainteté*; mais il est dur de servir l'un ou l'autre."

[4] *Ibid.*, § II: "Le genre humain, tel qu'il est, ne peut subsister, à moins qu'il n'y ait une infinité d'hommes utiles qui ne possèdent rien du tout," etc. [5] *Ibid.*, § I.

Privately, of course, a man may indulge his dream of equality to the full. The cardinal's cook, for example, may say: "I am a man as well as my master. I was born like him in tears, and like him shall die in anguish, attended by the same ceremonies. We both perform the same animal functions. If the Turk got possession of Rome, and I then became a cardinal, and my master a cook, I will take him into my service." A perfectly reasonable argument, says Voltaire; but pending the arrival of the Turk and the revolution at Rome the cook must do his job, or all human society is subverted. And that is the long and the short of it. There will always be in this melancholy world the rich, who command because they are rich, and the poor, who obey because they are poor. Equality is the most natural thing in the world—and the most chimerical.[1]

It will be clear that Voltaire was no *idéologue* or dreamer, however much he might work himself into a fury over the injustices of the world. He was a realist who gave the go-by to theories which conflict with the natural order and natural developments. For the mass of mankind he had no particular love; nor, it must be admitted, had he much use. It is thoroughly typical of the man that, in a letter to Prussian Frederick, who, like himself, professed to be an enlightener of the race, he once remarked:[2]

> Your Majesty will do the human race an eternal service by extirpating this infamous superstition [*i.e.*, Christianity]. I do not say among the rabble, who are not worthy of being enlightened, and who are apt for any yoke; I say among honest people, among men who think, among those who wish to think . . . 'tis for you to feed their minds; 'tis for you to give white bread to the children and to leave the *black bread for the dogs.*

And just as he excluded the mass of men from the intellectual community of which he himself was the uncrowned head so also he would deny them participation in political life, except in the subordinate position of associates.[3]

And now we come to what is ultimately the most significant of all Nature's provinces. In a letter to his friend

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Égalité."

[2] Voltaire to Frederick the Great, January 5, 1767 (R. Aldington, *Letters of Voltaire and Frederick the Great*, 1927).

[3] *Idées républicaines*, § XLIV.

Cideville Voltaire describes his position in regard to religion as that of neither a superstitious person nor an atheist. He stood for *bon sens* and the *juste milieu*, despising credulity on the one hand and combating the negation of the materialist on the other.[1] He remarks :[2]

> I was absorbed last night in the contemplation of nature, admiring the immensity, the courses, the relations, of those infinite globes, which are above the admiration of the vulgar. I admired still more the intelligence that presides over this vast machinery. I said to myself—a man must be blind not to be impressed by this spectacle; he must be stupid not to recognise its author; he must be mad not to adore him.

Belief in a Supreme Being he regarded as simply a logical deduction from the evidence of the senses. Not only so; it was an essential pillar for the maintenance of virtue and society. A community of atheists was to him unthinkable.[3]

But the Supreme Being on whom the cosmos depends is not the God of the Christian religion, the Father of mankind, Who dispenses love and justice in His Court in the heavens; He is the "éternel géomètre," "l'architecte de l'univers," "le machiniste," Who first created and set in motion the gigantic machinery of nature, but now remains for ever removed from His handiwork, a spectator and not a participant, a veritable *deus ex machina*.[4] Events in this world do not concern Him; and to invoke His name in relation to them would be mere absurdity, or worse, blasphemy; for it is inconceivable that such a Deity can be the author of the numberless crimes and cruelties that form the substance of the human record—a record which, in Voltaire's opinion, might, with advantage to the human race, be committed to the flames. "Je vous avoue," he once remarked,[5] "que je souhaiterais pour l'édification du genre humain qu'on jetât dans le feu toute l'histoire

[1] Voltaire to Cideville, April 12, 1756.

[2] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Religion," § II. *Cf.* also art. "Dieu," § I.

[3] "Il est donc absolument nécessaire pour les princes et pour les peuples que l'idée d'un être suprême . . . soit profondément gravée dans les esprits" (*Dict. phil.*, art. "Athéisme," § IV).

"S'il n'est pas si funeste que le fanatisme, il est presque toujours fatal à la vertu" (*ibid.*).

[4] "Le sage ne lui attribue aucune affection" (*De l'Âme*, 1774). *Cf.* also *Dict. phil.*, art. "Dieu."

[5] *L'A.B.C.*, 12e entretien.

civile et ecclésiastique; je n'y vois que des annales des crimes." Reason demands that we postulate a mighty, but not all-mighty Deity, and swallow the evil in the world as an inexplicable mystery.[1] It is of no more significance to Voltaire's God than sheep eaten by wolves or than flies devoured by spiders; it is simply the play of the machine, which moves incessantly in obedience to eternal laws. To attempt an explanation of the enigma is to fly into a Serbonian bog of metaphysical absurdities and impenetrable obscurities. The wise man simply bows his head and accepts with resignation.

But this transcendent Deity, unaffected by anything that happens in the world, natural or human, has planted the seeds of a moral order in the heart of man; in which Voltaire, relying on the evidence of consciousness, believes as implicitly as in the universality of reason and natural law.[2] The starting-point of the moral order is the same as that of society and the State—viz., the instinct of benevolence; and as it unfolds itself it takes shape as the great regulative principle in human affairs. Since it is of natural growth it is co-extensive with humanity and speaks a universal language:

> La morale uniforme en tout temps en tout lieu
> A des siècles sans fin parle au nom de ce Dieu;
> C'est la loi de Trajan, de Socrate, et la vôtre;
> De ce culte éternel la nature est l'apôtre.[3]

Show me, exclaims Voltaire,[4] any country where it would be deemed respectable and decent to plunder a man of the fruits of his labour, to break a solemn promise, to tell an injurious lie, to slander, murder, or poison, to be ungrateful to a benefactor, or to beat a father or mother presenting one with food! Obviously there is none.

[1] "Il y a certainement des choses que la suprême intelligence ne peut empêcher . . . il est donc très vraisemblable que Dieu n'a pu empêcher le mal" (*Traité de Memmius*, viii). *Cf.* also *Dict. phil.*, art. "Puissance, Toute-puissance."

"Avouez que le mal existe, et n'ajoutez pas à tant de misères et d'horreurs la fureur absurde de les nier" (*Il faut prendre un parti*, 15).

"Aucun philosophe n'a pu jamais expliquer l'origine du mal moral et du mal physique" (Preface to the *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*).

[2] "La notion de quelque chose de juste me semble si naturelle qu'elle est indépendante de toute loi, de tout parti, de toute religion. . . . La loi fondamentale de la morale agit également sur toutes les nations bien connues" (*Philosophe ignorant*, 31–38).

[3] *Poème sur la loi naturelle.*

[4] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Loi naturelle."

Here, then, we have the precepts of a natural religion as old as civilised humanity, as wide as the inhabited earth. "Adore-moi et sois juste!" is the inscription on its banners.[1] It represents the ethical core of all religions, the residuum after supernatural sanctions, theologies, metaphysics, and mysteries have been abstracted. Call it deism or *théisme* (as Voltaire himself preferred to name it); its disciple is he who says to God, "I adore and serve Thee!" and to the Turk, the Chinese, the Indian, and the Russian, "I love you!"[2] To do good is his worship, and to submit to God is his doctrine. He laughs at Mecca and Loretto; but he succours the indigent and defends the oppressed.[3]

Such, then, in main outline, was Voltaire's "Empire of Nature." It represents a rational, coherent, and natural order of things, to which humanity has attained or may attain by the exercise of reason. We turn now to the "Empire of Custom," with a view to observing the character and scope of the criticisms which Voltaire is enabled to pass upon it in virtue of his investigations into the natural order.

And first of all the Law. Coming as he did from a contemplation of nature's harmonious system of law, Voltaire's attitude to human law was bound to be radical and sweeping.[4] He declares war not only against particular injustices, but against the whole method of law-making prevalent in his day and prior to it. It was disorderly and unscientific. An apologist might indulge in the opinion that imperfections are inevitable because laws are made by men. Not so Voltaire. He brushes aside the contention with impatience. Men have produced works of great utility and excellence in other directions; and it is only reasonable to surmise that they who perfected the arts of life were capable of devising a respectable code of jurisprudence had they set about it in the proper way.

[1] "Notre religion est sans doute divine, puisqu'elle a été gravée dans nos cœurs par Dieu même . . . qui a dit au Chinois, à l'Indien, au Tartare, et à vous: 'Adore-moi et sois juste!' Notre religion est aussi ancien que le monde." (*Profession de foi des Théistes.*)

[2] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Théiste." [3] *Ibid.*

[4] "Il n'y a aucun bon code dans aucun pays" (*Dict. phil.*, art. "Lois." § III). "Voulez-vous avoir des bonnes lois; brûlez les vôtres et faites-en de nouvelles" (*ibid.*, § I).

Voltaire's criticism of law and laws is to be found in his *Dictionary* under the title "Lois."

It is not the fallibility of man that is to blame; the explanation of the chaos must lie rather in the fact that laws have not been made according to any system, but at random and planlessly, either from motives of self-interest on the part of legislators, or from the urgency of the moment, or from ignorance or superstition, much in the same way as cities have been built. Cast your eye, Voltaire suggests, over Paris from the squalid quarter of the Halles to the beauty and splendour of the Louvre and the Tuileries, and you will have a vivid picture of the condition of the laws—a picture of violent contrasts, tumultuous, uneven. If, on the other hand, you wish to see what a perfect code of law devised by human hands can be turn to games, and there you will find yourself among laws that are throughout just, clear, and inviolable, marked by impartial and admirable execution.[1] Why is it, he asks, that the Indian who invented the game of chess and laid down its laws is obeyed willingly and promptly all over the world, while the decretals of the Pope, for example, are at present an object of horror and contempt? Surely, he suggests, because the inventor of chess combined everything with caution and exactness, having a careful regard to the satisfaction of the players, and the Pope in his decretals considers only his own interest.[2]

But the lack of method in the making of laws is only part of the evil. There is the further consideration that the world is buried under a load of moribund, defunct, superannuated, or obsolete laws, devised in the first instance, no doubt, to meet specific contingencies, but permitted through carelessness, or self-interest, to persist into an age which no longer calls for them, and finds them an intolerable burden.[3] France, in particular, was suffering from a nightmare of such laws, and they varied from province to province and district to district, to such an extent that the traveller, in Voltaire's words, changed his laws as often as he changed his post-horses.

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Contradictions," § I: "Un homme qui a été laquais s'il joue au lansquenet avec des rois, est payé sans difficulté, quand il gagne."

[2] *Ibid.*, art. "Lois," § III.

[3] "Quand les besoins ont changé, les lois qui sont demeurées sont devenues ridicules. . . . La loi qui donne tout le fief à l'aîné est fort bonne dans un temps d'anarchie et de pillage. . . . Or cette loi, convenable à des possesseurs de donjons du temps de Chilperic, est détestable quand il s'agit de partager les rentes dans une ville" (*ibid.*).

The chaos was still worse confounded by the armies of commentators who battened on the confusion. And the social and political consequences were of grave significance to the nation. No moral or political unity could exist amid such a welter of heterogeneous laws. From the Alps to the Pyrenees, says Voltaire,[1] France is not a single people, but a collection of some forty distinct and separate populations who are as much strangers to one another as Tonquin to Cochin China, an expression which recalls Mirabeau's celebrated aphorism—"La France est une aggrégation inconstituée des peuples désunis."

Clearly Voltaire was right when he clamoured for simplification and uniformity. Let the whole law, he cried,[2] be clear, uniform, and precise, so that it needs no interpreter; for to interpret is almost always to corrupt. And to make a beginning he was prepared to commit all existing laws to the flames. With the impatience which characterised him once he grasped a great principle, he affirmed that the task of reconstruction was easy. Any group of sensible men, drawn from any part of the world, and set to work, could furnish forth, within the space of an hour, thirty laws of a nature beneficial to mankind.[3] All that was required for law-making was common sense and a knowledge of normal human needs. So thinks the philosopher always when confronted with the technical intricacies of legal phraseology. Had the veteran Coke been alive he would have pointed out to the eighteenth-century *philosophe*, as he pointed out to his own philosopher-king, that law was not founded upon natural reason, but upon artificial reason, steeped in tradition and antiquity.[4] But in this case the philosopher was right. If the laws of France were to be consolidated, simplified, and recodified the driving force was not to be looked for from the lawyers, but from reason armed with a knowledge of the political and social needs of the age. What Voltaire prescribed as a remedy for the disunion of the kingdom the Revolution made possible and the iron-handed genius of Napoleon achieved. The

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Lois," § III. *Cf.* also *Dict. phil.*, arts. "Gouvernement," § III, and "Coutumes."

[2] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Lois civiles et ecclésiastiques."

[3] *Ibid.*, art. "Lois," § IV.

[4] F. W. Maitland, *Constitutional History of England*, pp. 268–269.

Code Napoléon is the concrete embodiment of the philosopher's dream. May we not credit Voltaire with something of a prophet's penetration and vision?

The weightiest, however, of all Voltaire's criticisms of the law falls, as we might expect it would fall, not on its form, but on its administration. Laws might be chaotic, obsolete, unsystematic; they might not take into their purview, as they ought, the whole secular life of society. But if they are administered in a spirit of benevolence and justice, and not by formalists and fanatics, the damage done to the individual need not be intolerable. A wise judge may do much to temper the acerbities of the formal code.[1] Unfortunately in eighteenth-century France the spirit of the administration was no better than the letter of the law. Every part of the procedure in criminal cases seemed devised to procure conviction and condemnation of the accused. Antecedent to the trial proper, efforts were made in secret to extract a 'confession.' Torture was applied if deemed expedient. When he was actually arraigned he was confronted not with witnesses, but with 'sworn testimony' of alleged witnesses, who remained anonymous to the prisoner. Their credibility was not subjected to adequate scrutiny by the officiating judge, and their evidence was not checked by cross-examination at the hands of the accused or his lawyer. To make matters worse, two witnesses were regarded as sufficient to send a man to his doom in a matter that might involve capital punishment.[2]

To anyone who believed with all his soul in natural rights such a state of affairs seemed no better than the unashamed triumph of brute force. We ask, says Voltaire,[3] that a theorem in geometry shall be proved by rigid demonstration, and yet the life of a man or woman depends on mere probability. True, there cannot be mathematical certainty of proof in legal cases —certainty, that is, of such a nature that it is physically or

[1] "Le premier devoir d'un magistrat est d'être juste avant d'être formaliste" (*Dict. phil.*, art. "Conscience," § II).

[2] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Crimes ou délits de temps et de lieu," § "Question si deux témoins suffisent," etc.; *ibid.*, art. "Criminel," § "Procédure criminelle chez certaines nations." *Cf.* also F. H. Maugham, *The Case of Jean Calas* (1928).

[3] *Ibid.*, "Certain, Certitude": "Quoi! il faut une démonstration pour oser assurer que la surface d'une sphère est égale à quatre fois l'aire de son grand cercle, et il n'en faudra pas pour arracher la vie à un citoyen par un supplice affreux!"

morally impossible that the thing can be otherwise. But if this be so all the more reason that the alleged probability be scrupulously tested. The mere number of witnesses is nothing if the probability which they assert is denied by the accused; nay, if against a hundred thousand probabilities that the accused be guilty there is a single one that he is innocent that alone should outweigh all the rest.[1] Therefore let every judge, before passing sentence of guilt, consult carefully the age, rank, and conduct of the accused, the interest he could have in committing the crime, and the interest of his enemies to destroy him; let him say to himself: "Will not posterity, will not the whole of Europe, condemn my sentence? Shall I sleep tranquilly with my hands stained with innocent blood?"[2]

And as for the sentence—away with all savage and excessive punishments. Let the teaching of the philosophic Beccaria be accepted and punishments be proportioned to the crime. If the servant-girl who steals a dozen napkins be hanged on the public gallows she is prevented from becoming the possible mother of a dozen children, and thereby adding to the number of citizens in the country. Instead of preventing theft such excessive punishment really increases it, because no master will be so cruel as to get his coachman hanged for stealing a few oats; but every master would prosecute if the punishment were simply proportioned to the crime. On the other hand, if the crime of theft is punishable by death the thief is encouraged to add murder to his account, as in Italy, where there are scarcely any highway robberies unaccompanied by assassinations.[3] It would be much better, says Voltaire, to make the punishment of criminals useful to society. A man condemned to the public works is still serviceable to his country, and a living lecture against crime; but a man hanged is useful to no one. Are there no roads that want to be mended? he cries; no uncultivated lands to be broken up?

> I should like to ask those who are so fond of erecting gibbets, piles, and scaffolds, and pouring leaden balls through the human brain, whether they are always labouring under the horrors of famine, and

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Crimes," § "Des crimes de temps et de lieu qu'on doit ignorer."
[2] *Ibid.*, art. "Certain, Certitude."
[3] *Ibid.*, art. "Supplices," § III.

whether they kill their fellow-creatures from any apprehension that there are more of them than can be maintained.[1]

As for the practice of torture, it is as futile as was the *duellum* for the detection of guilt. The robust criminal endures it stoically and escapes; the feeble innocent succumbs and suffers. In fact, torture is a longer and more terrible suffering than death, for the accused is punished before it is certain that he is a criminal, and punished more cruelly than if he were put to death.[2]

If Voltaire's criticism of human law flows directly from his conception of natural law and natural rights, his attitude to established religion is based with equal appropriateness on his conception of natural religion. As we have seen, the religion he espoused consisted of a very brief asseveration of belief in a transcendant Deity, and of obedience to the moral precepts which this Deity reveals to the human heart by reason. It carries with it no superstructure of theology, no dogma, no mysteries; in fact, nothing could be simpler, more universal, or less controversial. "Qu'on me montre," exclaims Voltaire,[3] "dans l'histoire du monde entier, une seule querelle sur cette profession de foi: j'adore Dieu et je dois être bienfaisant!"

How different was the record of Christianity revealed by history! Cradled in the tolerant Græco-Roman world, it had, from the first, displayed a temper the very antithesis of that which permitted its establishment and growth.[4] Claiming the possession of a unique revelation, it had destroyed the basis of ancient civilisation, and cast the sword of intolerance and sectarian strife into a society which had never known religious wars, to be, in the end, itself decimated by the same sword.[5] To the eye of the candid critic who took his stand on reason and natural religion its history appeared as an almost unrelieved

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Supplices," § I. [2] *Ibid.*, art. "Question, Torture."
[3] *De la Paix perpétuelle*, c. 28.
[4] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Liberté de conscience: Liberté de penser."
[5] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Tolérance." *Cf.* also *De la Paix perpétuelle*, c. 5 and 19: "L'esprit de contention, d'irrésolution, de division, de querelle avait presidé au berceau de l'Église"; "Avant que ce monstre [*i.e.*, intolérantisme] naquît, jamais il n'y avait eu de guerres religieuses sur la terre"; also (Voltaire to Frederick II, January 5, 1767) "La nôtre [*i.e.*, religion] est sans contredit la plus ridicule, la plus absurde, et la plus sanguinaire, qui ait jamais infecté le monde"; and (*Sermon des cinquante*, 3e point) "Cette religion chrétienne, qui a été la source de tant de divisions, de guerres civiles et de crimes," etc.

orgy of fanaticism, persecution, and bloodshed; of states overthrown and countless human beings immolated; of banners blazing in the name of God from one end of Europe to the other; of civil wars and fratricidal strife; of kings destroyed by poison or dagger; of usurpers, tyrants, executioners, sacrilegious robbers, and bloodstained parricides violating under the impulse of religion every convention human and divine [1] —all because Christianity emphasised belief rather than morality, and placed salvation in the holding of a correct dogma. Voltaire remarks: [2]

> Le sang a coulé dans les campagnes et sur les échafauds, pour les arguments de théologie, tantôt dans un pays, tantôt dans un autre, pendant cinq cents années, presque sans interruption; et ce fléau n'a duré si longtemps que parce qu'on a toujours négligé la morale pour le dogme.

And again: [3]

> C'est ainsi que vous verrez dans ce vaste tableau des démences humaines, les sentiments des théologiens, les superstitions des peuples, le fanatisme, variés sans cesse, mais toujours constants à plonger la terre dans l'abrutissement et la calamité.

It is no reply to this savage and sardonic denunciation to say that Voltaire lacked spiritual insight, that he had no ear for the still, small voice that speaks in the human conscience, or that he knew nothing of the emotion of holiness. The religion he attacked had none of these things; and it was precisely for that reason that he attacked it. True religion and Voltaire were at one on this point: the Church was *l'infâme* to the enlightened conscience of his age.[4]

And what was the remedy for this plague of intolerance? It cannot be found in the laws, says Voltaire,[5] because the persons in question are fully convinced that the Holy Spirit which animates them is above all laws; nor can it be found in religion, because religion only feeds the distemper. The only hope lies in the civilising power of the philosopher; "il n'est d'autre remède à cette maladie épidemique que l'esprit philosophique: la raison en se perfectionnant, détruit les germes de guerres

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Fanatisme," § I.
[2] *Essai sur les mœurs*, c. CXCVII.
[3] *Ibid.*, c. LXII.
[4] Lord Morley, *Voltaire*, Chapter V.
[5] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Fanatisme."

de religion." [1] Instructed by philosophy, the human mind realises that absolute truth is unattainable beyond the narrow limit of mathematical science, that all sects are merely "titles of error," and that it would be easier to subjugate the whole universe by force of arms than to subjugate the minds of men in a single town.[2] Therefore toleration is the only policy in matters affecting belief. Once this position is reached by the enlightened man, he can afford to laugh at the futilities of theological controversy—"si on ne peut étrangler le dernier moliniste avec les boyaux du dernier janséniste, rendons ces perturbateurs du repos public ridicules aux yeux des honnêtes gens." [3]

Then, again, if the Christian religion is divine, says Voltaire,[4] why employ force in defence of it? God, Who is its author, will defend it without human help; intolerance only breeds hypocrites or rebels. Its true function in the world is to inculcate worship and justice, to make man more worthy of heaven's bounty by virtuous acts, and to maintain peace in society. Its relationships with mankind must therefore be spiritual. It may exhort, advise, persuade, console, appeal to the fear of punishment or the hope of reward; it cannot, without destroying its own nature, invading the unalterable rights of conscience, the freedom of the mind and the constitution of the soul, appeal to physical means in any shape or form. The extreme penalty which it may legitimately employ—viz., excommunication, or deprivation of the privilege of membership—applies only to those who voluntarily accept its authority. And even in their case no civil penalties ought to be incurred; the natural rights of the citizen remain intact despite ecclesiastical thunders.[5]

Look at England, Voltaire would say, if you wish to see the fruits of toleration.

> Go into the London Exchange, a place more respectable than many Courts, and you will see there assembled the deputies of all

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Fanatisme," § II. *Cf.* also (Voltaire to Dalembert, November 9, 1764): "Il me semble qu'eux seuls [*i.e.*, les philosophes] ont un peu adouci les mœurs des hommes, et que sans eux nous aurions deux ou trois Saint-Barthélemy de siècle en siècle."

[2] *Traité sur la tolérance*, c. XXI.

[3] Voltaire to Dalembert, May 8, 1761.

[4] *Traité sur la tolérance*, c. XI.

[5] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Droit Canonique," § I ("Du Ministère ecclésiastique") and § IV ("Des Peines ecclésiastiques").

> nations for the good of mankind. There the Jew, the Mohammedan, and the Christian traffic with each other as if they were of the same religion, and give the name of infidel to those only who go bankrupt. There the Presbyterian trusts the Anabaptist, and the Anglican receives the promise of the Quaker. On leaving these pacific and free assemblies one lot go to the Synagogue, another to have a drink; this one goes to have himself baptised in a great basin in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, that one has his son circumcised, and murmurs over his infant Hebraic words which he does not understand; these others go into their church to wait upon the inspiration of God with their hats upon their heads, and all are satisfied.[1]

But toleration was only the minimum of Voltaire's demands. He insisted upon complete liberty of conscience—*i.e.*, freedom of the individual from all authority, temporal or spiritual, in matters affecting conscience. And the first condition of this larger liberty was the abrogation of the *juridiction ecclésiastique*.[2] It seemed to him irrational and absurd that the canon law should impinge upon the civil life of the community, and dispose it in the interests not of the community itself, but of an organisation whose outlook, connexions, and objects were international, whose policy was determined by a sovereignty beyond the frontiers, and whose whole existence was therefore a perpetual challenge to the omni-competence of secular authority and the well-being of society. His argument is cogent.

> To deliver to those who ought to be solely employed in conducting men to heaven an authority upon the earth is to produce a union of two powers, the abuse of which is only too easy. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is not of this world; he refused to be a judge upon earth, and ordered that men should give to Cæsar the things that belong to Cæsar; he forbade the domination of the Apostles, and preached only humility, gentleness, and dependence. From him ecclesiastics can derive neither power, authority, dominion, nor jurisdiction in this world. They can therefore possess no legitimate authority but by a concession from the sovereign or State, from whom all authority in a society can properly emanate.[3]

[1] *Lettres sur les anglais*, 6e lettre.

[2] *Dict. phil.*, art. " Droit Canonique," § I : " Il suit encore de là que le souverain, attentif à ne souffrir aucun partage de son autorité, ne doit permettre aucune entreprise qui mette les membres de la société dans une dépendance extérieure et civile d'un corps ecclésiastique."

[3] *Ibid.*, § VII.

Having thus announced the supremacy of the State over the whole secular life of society, Voltaire proposes to withdraw from the province of the Church the ceremony of marriage, wills and testaments, education, registration of baptisms, marriages, and deaths—all of which, he declares, fall within the jurisdiction of the civil magistrate.[1] In short, he proclaimed a vast secularisation of human life, tantamount to what the Reformation had accomplished in Protestant countries.

Take, for example, his argument on behalf of the secularisation of marriage; it is typical of his general attitude. Marriage, he asserts,[2] is the union of a man and a woman for the procreation of children, to secure their due nurture, and to assure to them their rights and properties under the laws—a union recognised by the law of nations. In order to confirm and establish this union, it is accompanied by a religious ceremony, which some regard as a sacrament and others as a part of public worship, but which can change nothing in the thing itself. If the contract be in accord with the law of nations marriage may produce all its civil and natural effect whether there be a ceremony or no. Being the most important engagement in society, it cannot be denationalised, and must fall within the authority of the magistrate. The jurisprudence of all ages and countries accepts this principle. But in France, thanks to the sanction which the State gives to the *juridiction ecclésiastique*, the contract is invalid unless solemnised according to canonical forms; and by implication one million Huguenots find their marriage illegal and their children's status in jeopardy. *Ergo* the State must assert its supremacy and abrogate the control exercised by the canon law.

He carries the attack on the Church still farther than this. Not content with destroying its jurisdiction, he would also weaken it as a corporation. It holds its possessions, he asserts,[3] not in virtue of any divine or natural right, but under the law, and upon such conditions as the law allows. To talk of a divine right to property, or to say that any

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Droit Canonique," § VI ("Inspection des magistrats sur l'administration des Sacraments").

[2] *Ibid. Cf.* also art. "Mariage," §§ II and III.

[3] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Droit Canonique," § II ("Des Possessions des ecclésiastiques").

property is sacred, in the sense that it cannot be touched by the State, is mere absurdity; for property, which is material, cannot be rendered sacred in any sense, either figuratively or literally. The true wealth of the Church is in heaven; the wealth it possesses in this world must fall, like all wealth, under the overruling authority of the civil power. Should the State exempt it by law from the common liabilities the law is revocable. In fact, the immunities and exemptions enjoyed by ecclesiastical wealth may be revised, curtailed, or abolished as the State sees fit in the interests of equity and an equal apportionment of the civic burdens. And this principle applies to all wealth possessed by the Church, whether bequeathed by will or acquired in any other way; for no donor may denationalise the property he hands over by abstracting it from public charges and the authority of the laws.

Finally, the Voltairean State has a comprehensive right, in the name of public well-being, to inspect, supervise, and control the Church; to sanction and regulate ecclesiastical assemblies, and to know what takes place in them; to approve of prayers, canticles, and ceremonies; to regulate public holidays; to supervise all oral instruction and books of instruction; to impose silence in the case of disputes between ecclesiastics and to punish the disobedient; and to inquire into the organisation of the monastic orders, whose possessions, if the public interest demanded it, could be diminished, divided up, and put into circulation, or employed in any other way desirable for the benefit of all.[1]

Here, then, we must leave Voltaire. The next chapter in his political thought belongs to the history of the Revolution. He was no revolutionary himself, it is true; for the transformation of society which he envisaged was primarily on an intellectual plane rather than a political.[2] But his penetrating analysis of the evils from which France was suffering, his remorseless criticism of the basis on which the *ancien régime* rested, together with his clear indications of the lines along which reconstruction should proceed, had sown the seeds of a radical change in the structure of society, and were, in some respects, tantamount to a programme for revolutionaries to

[1] *Dict. phil.*, art. "Droit Canonique," § III.
[2] Lord Morley, *Voltaire*, pp. 248–249.

seize upon and apply when time and circumstances were favourable. In the practical world, therefore, Voltaire's influence was undeniable and significant.

In the realm of philosophic speculation, on the other hand, it is doubtful whether he announced any fruitful principle which opened up fresh perspectives or broke new ground. The Lockian philosophy he espoused and popularised passed into the French mind by other channels, and resulted in a 'sensationalism' and 'materialism'[1] which Voltaire himself repudiated.

His permanent contribution to philosophical thought lies not in the speculative sphere, but in his magnificent exposition of the principles of liberty and toleration. In this respect he stands with Locke in the forefront of a new epoch in the history of the modern State.

J. B. Black

[1] J. G. Hibben, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 118.

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VII

ROUSSEAU

THE most important event in modern history prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917 was without question the French Revolution of 1789. It marked the triumphant advent of that democracy which during the nineteenth century established its ascendancy throughout the Western world. To treat of the French Revolution itself does not, of course, fall within the scope of the present work: the examination of the Revolutionary era and the analysis of the ideas and institutions generated during that tremendous time will be the task of the next series of studies. The period now under review, however, was precisely that in which the causes that precipitated the Revolution were gathering force, and it is not too much to say that the principal interest of the Age of Reason, with which we are now concerned, centres in the examination of those influences that were bringing the old *régime* to an end and instituting the new. The examination of these influences is all the more fascinating because they were subtle influences whose operation was hidden from the eyes of almost all contemporary observers; even Mme de Pompadour's famous "Après nous le déluge" was merely the utterance of the perennial bankrupt in the presence of the eternal moneylender.[1] The eighteenth-century world went on smoothly with superficial gaiety, while beneath the surface seethed silently the gathering discontents.

The discontents in France, where they first came to a head, were of many and various kinds. There was political discontent, particularly on the part of the cultivated and prosperous middle class—the lawyers, the physicians, the

[1] *Cf.* the Greek Ἐμοῦ θανόντος γαῖα μιχθήτω πυρί, "When I am dead let the earth be consumed by fire."

financiers—on whose contributions the government was entirely dependent for existence, but to whose interests and opinions it paid not the slightest regard. There was social and economic discontent, shared by the whole of the third estate, middle class and lower class alike, as it contemplated, on the one hand, the magnitude of the burdens of State imposed upon itself, and, on the other hand, the iniquity of the exemptions and privileges conceded to the favoured estates of the nobles and the clergy. But, above all, there was intellectual discontent, the revolt of the emancipated mind of man against both the tyranny of an absolute monarchy claiming to rule by divine right and the inquisitorial oppression of a decadent and obscurantist Church which strove to maintain its ascendancy by persecution. Many other minor sources of discontent—racial, provincial, communal, personal—contributed to cause the great upheaval.

Into the vehemently controversial problem which of these various causes was the prime and controlling cause of the Revolution it is fortunately not necessary for us here to enter. It is sufficient for our present purpose, first, to note that the causes were numerous, separate, and distinct—not reducible to any one single cause, whether economic or any other; and, secondly, to stress the importance of the intellectual causes and to point out how, among these, the influence of the writings of Rousseau stood pre-eminent.

Lord Acton in his epoch-making lectures on the French Revolution—which it was the privilege of the present writer to attend—laid dominant emphasis on the movements of ideas which marked this seminal pre-Revolutionary period, the Age of Reason. His opening discourse was wholly devoted to the thinkers whom he termed the "heralds of the Revolution." Among them he included a number of persons whose memory has now become dim, and the echoes of whose words have died away—*e.g.*, Domat, Jurieu, and Maultrat. But besides and above these he placed such men of enduring eminence as Fénelon, Diderot, and Turgot; and, high over all, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau. Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*, with its fascinating examination of the connexion between climate and constitution, made havoc of the doctrine of the divine right of kings and the

dogma of the universal validity of monarchy, teaching with unmistakeable clarity the truth of the relativity of political institutions. Voltaire, with his devastating *Candide* and other works, poured destructive ridicule upon the pretensions of the corrupt and ignorant priesthood. But, more potent than either of the two, Rousseau, by means of his *Discours* and his *Contrat social*, undermined the whole social system of the old *régime*, and prepared the way for the new democratic order by promulgating his revelation of the primitive liberty, equality, and fraternity of mankind.

Montesquieu made a convincing appeal to constitutional lawyers, fostering in them that admiration for the separated powers and balanced functions of the English system of government, which ultimately engendered the French constitution of 1790. Voltaire, by his brilliant if scurrilous wit, won the ear of the literary world, and helped to disseminate in polite society that scorn of Catholic dogma which led in the opening months of the Revolution not only to the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church, but also to the formal repudiation of Christianity. The influence of both Montesquieu and Voltaire, however, was limited in scope and ephemeral in duration; the French constitution of 1790 lasted for but little more than a year; the effort to extirpate the Church and eliminate the Christian religion led to a revival of evangelical faith that culminated in a new *concordat* with Rome, the presence of the Pope at the coronation of Napoleon, and a general widespread Romantic reaction in the early nineteenth century. And the curious thing is that one of the main causes why the Revolution went, politically, far beyond the point to which Montesquieu's ideas carried it, and why it returned, in the region of religion, to a point far short of that to which Voltaire's ribaldry for a time succeeded in luring it, was the influence of Rousseau. For Rousseau's passionate assertion of the sovereignty of the people and the supreme authority of its general will indicated an advance in the direction of democracy incomparably more rapid and complete than any movement which up to that time had taken place in England; while his sublime proclamation of the worship of *l'Être Suprême*, with its appendant dogma of personal immortality, marked an extreme emotional revulsion

from the arid deism of Voltaire and the blatant atheism of Holbach.

The influence of Rousseau, as the event proved, was far more potent, far wider in its scope, and far more persistent than that of either Montesquieu or Voltaire. Who, at the present day, apart from the professed student of political ideas, reads the 595 chapters of the *Esprit des lois*? Who, except specialists in literature, wade through the seventy volumes which Voltaire bequeathed to posterity, or peruse for either profit or pleasure anything that he wrote beyond a few of his inimitable tales? Both Montesquieu and Voltaire belonged, and belonged exclusively, to the eighteenth century. They influenced their own age profoundly, and in doing so, no doubt, indirectly influenced all subsequent ages; but directly and immediately they made no appeal to generations that had ceased to be afflicted by a despotic monarchy and a persecuting Church. Rousseau, on the other hand, not only reached and moved an immeasurably larger multitude in his own day, he continued to exercise a powerful sway long after he himself and all his contemporaries had passed away. Nay, even at the present moment his *Discours*, his *Contrat social*, his *Nouvelle Héloïse*, and his *Émile* are among the active forces that move the minds of living men and determine the course of current politics.

If we ask what was the secret of his power it may be replied, first, that he made his appeal not, as did Montesquieu and Voltaire, to the small select circles of the lawyers or the literary men, but to the masses of the common folk; that he brought political theory and social speculation down from the study into the street, and propounded doctrines that profoundly moved the mind and will of the hitherto unregarded proletarians; that he voiced, as never before, the sentiments and emotions of the long-inarticulate multitudes of the peasants, the artisans, and the lower middle class. Secondly, it may be remarked that, though he lacked the learning of Montesquieu and the logic of Voltaire, he was possessed of a passion such as neither of them ever knew; he wrote in a white heat of emotion, and he displayed a magnetic capacity to rouse his readers to the same pitch of fervour as himself; he had a deep well of pity for the poor and a volcanic fury of hatred for

the rich, and he succeeded by effortless instinct in conveying his sentiments to others. For—and this is the third secret of his power—he was gifted with a superb literary style. It was a natural endowment. As a youth he had no ambition to write; he received no training in the art and craft of letters; until he was nearly forty he published nothing, and even then he was turned to composition by the merest accident. He wrote because he had something to say, and his style was determined by his passionate desire to deliver his message in language that should be intelligible to all. Hence his words were perfectly adjusted to his subject; he said plain things plainly, and fine things finely; his utterances were the lucid expressions of his many-sided personality; with him more than with most writers the style was the man.

So intimately, indeed, were Rousseau's writings associated with his life that it is impossible to comprehend them without a detailed knowledge of his curious and remarkable career. And, fortunately, a knowledge of his career is extremely easy to acquire. It has, in fact, been said that we have more information about Rousseau than about any other human being whatsoever; and if we include under 'information' what is false as well as what is true the statement is probably correct. For, to begin with, he himself has left us in his *Confessions* so full and confidential a record of his early escapades that only in extensively expurgated editions is it considered proper to allow the book to be promiscuously circulated. His later vagaries, characterised by lunacy rather than lubricity, are recorded with equal candour in his *Dialogues* and his *Reveries*. Besides his own amazing revelations, moreover, we have countless supplementary sources of information—of varying degrees of trustworthiness—in the diaries and correspondence of his few friends, such as Le Bègue du Presle, and of his many enemies, among whom Grimm, Diderot, and Mme d'Epinay stand pre-eminent.

From numerous and varied sources we get the impression of a man of high originality and undoubted genius; an intense individualist, impatient of any sort of restraint; a man inordinately vain, yet shy, self-conscious, timid, awkward in society, happy only when alone; a man devoid of will-power, deficient in moral fibre, a slave to sensual passion, the play-

thing of circumstance; yet a man sensitive to noble impulses, full of kindly sympathies, pitiful towards weakness and suffering, full of fury against tyranny and injustice, capable of copious weeping on any convenient occasion. He loved the human race, although he quarrelled with every specimen of it with which he was brought into any but the most transient contact.

II

The sixty-six years of Rousseau's life can be divided for the purposes of our brief survey into five periods which we will distinguish as follows: first, the undisciplined boy, 1712–28; second, the super-tramp, 1728–42; third, the would-be man of the world, 1742–49; fourth, the inspired maniac, 1749–62; fifth and last, the hunted fugitive, 1762–78.

1. *The Undisciplined Boy* (1712–28). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as is well known, was born in Geneva, the great autonomous city-state of Switzerland, the headquarters of militant Calvinism. His birth and early training in that city are cardinal facts of his career; for his political ideals always remained municipal, and his religion, even when it took the mould of Catholicism or of deism, never lost its Calvinistic character. But though he was Genevan to the bone his ancestry carried him back to a French stock on the one side and a Savoyard stock on the other; and he seemed to combine in his own person the Genevan *solennité* with the *légèreté* of his Gallic great-grandfather and the *vivacité* of his Savoyard great-grandmother. His mother died in giving him birth, and the task of educating and bringing him up thus remained in the sole hands of his father, Isaac Rousseau, a watchmaker by profession, but a dancing-master by preference whenever the vigilance of the Calvinistic elders was relaxed. He could hardly have had a worse instructor; for, we are told, Isaac Rousseau "was absolutely without any feeling of responsibility; he lacked character; he allowed himself to be driven as circumstances dictated." Certainly he neither gave, nor was capable of giving, any systematic training to his son; still less did he subject him to any moral discipline. On the contrary, he made him as he grew up the companion of his less desirable

pursuits. In particular, as the boy approached adolescence he helped to inflame his nascent passions by reading with him far into the night the erotic romances of such writers as La Calprenède and Mme de Scudéry.

When, however, Jean-Jacques was ten years old (1722) the parental demoralisation was suddenly ended; for his excitable father got involved in a brawl which caused him to flee from Geneva into the Duchy of Savoy, leaving his son, totally unprovided for, to be looked after by whosoever among his relatives cared to undertake the task. An uncle took charge of him and sent him for two years to a school at Bossey, whence he departed (1724) without having learned or attempted to learn anything. He was then placed in a clerk's office with a view to the profession of the law, but a very few months of unpunctuality, laziness, indiscipline, and incompetence secured his decisive dismissal (1725). Next he was apprenticed to an engraver, under whom, within three years, he became an accomplished liar and thief. His complete moral *débâcle*, which he acknowledges and describes with engaging frankness in his *Confessions*, he attributes entirely to the brutality and tyranny of his master. Throughout the whole of his life, indeed, no matter how discreditable his deeds, he regards himself as the innocent and helpless victim of circumstances. He was almost devoid of conscience or sense of shame; only once or twice—as when by a deliberate and repeated falsehood he secured the dismissal of a fellow-servant for a theft which he himself had committed—did a slight compunction seize him. His wholehearted acceptance of the one-sided psychology which regards the mind of man as entirely determined by environment is one of the keys not only to his ethics, but also to his sociology.

The merest accident brought his undisciplined and disgusting infancy to a close. On Sunday evening, March 14, 1728, he went with two companions for a walk in the outskirts of Geneva. They were late in returning, and they found the city gates shut for the night. Twice had this happened before, and Rousseau's master had threatened condign punishment if it should occur again. Rousseau decided not to face the music. The one perfect consistency in his career, indeed, is his unvarying observance of the rule: When in trouble run

away! In his opinion, if presence of mind is good, absence of body is better.

Hence at the age of sixteen, with nothing but the clothes he stood up in, without money, without friends, without plans, without aim or object in life, without education, without skill, without any capacity to render any but the most menial services to his fellows, he set himself adrift, compassless, upon the ocean of circumstance. He had, however, the true vagabond spirit. That is to say, he lived wholly in the present. He was free from all regrets for the past and all anxieties for the future. He revelled in the sunshine while it lasted; he took shelter from the rain when it came; he helped himself, so far as he could, to everything he wanted; he availed himself of the assistance of every one whom he met; he begged, he stole, he told lies, he professed piety, he changed his religion; he did anything, in short, which his interests seemed to indicate, or circumstances to suggest as expedient.

2. *The Super-tramp* (1728–42). Into the details of the fourteen years of his vagabondage it is, of course, as impossible as it is unnecessary for us here to enter. If there are any of my readers who are not acquainted with the amazing narrative of Books II–VI of the *Confessions* they should hasten to peruse it. The most astonishing of the many marvels which it displays is the extraordinary way in which this aimless and unprincipled drifter found friend after friend to assist him on his erratic course and to maintain him in complete or partial idleness. The two impressions that one gets as one reads what he tells us of M. de Pontverre, Mme de Warens, Mme Basile, the Countess Vercelli, the Count Gouvon, the Abbé Gaime, M. Godard, M. de Mably, and the rest of his many benefactors are, first, a realisation of the immense wealth of kindness and compassion that exists in the world; and, secondly, a sense that there must have been something unusually attractive about this super-tramp—some hint of genius, some breath of distinction, some premonition of greatness, that served to mark him out as different from the common vagrant. He was never able, however, to retain any friendship permanently. His vanity, his egoism, his bad manners, his loose morals, his incapacity for any continuous employment, his sensitiveness, his quarrelsomeness, his irresponsibility—these and other

kindred defects of character ultimately wore out the patience of all his benefactors, and they had to shake him off. Mme de Warens stood him longer than anyone else: no fewer than five times did she receive him into her ambiguous home. But at last even she grew cold and hostile, and then (1742) Rousseau, at the age of thirty, was at last compelled to fend for himself.

His various residences under the roof of Mme de Warens, however, had been decisive of the course of his career. From her he had learned something of the ways of the world, and something of the manners of polite society. She had provided him with opportunities to develop a natural talent for music which he had unexpectedly displayed. Above all, she had supplied him with books, and had so directed his reading that he to some extent had been able to make up for the gross defects of his early education. It was at Mme de Warens' country villa, Les Charmettes, near Chambéry, that (1738–40) his mind effectively awoke, that his imagination was quickened, and that his speculations respecting religion and politics began to take shape. Les Charmettes was, indeed, the birthplace both of modern democracy and of *l'Être Suprême* of the French Revolution. When, however, after a year's absence Rousseau returned to Les Charmettes, in 1741, his reception was such as to cause him finally to pack up and depart (spring 1742).

3. *The Would-be Man of the World* (1742–49). One reason why Rousseau was the more ready to leave Les Charmettes in 1742 was that he had invented a new form of musical notation which he was anxious to demonstrate before the Academy in Paris. He accordingly secured letters of introduction and made his way to the French capital in July 1742. His musical notation was speedily and decisively rejected by the Academy; but his introductions secured his admission to several of the *salons* of the great, where at first he was welcomed as a curiosity, but where soon he became dreaded as a boor and a bore. Hence, in order to get rid of him, influence was brought to bear to secure him a position in the French Embassy at Venice. To Venice he went, and at Venice he remained, in the service of the Comte de Montaigu, for about a year (1743–44). Long before the end of that time, however, his self-assertiveness and impudence, and possibly also his irresponsibility and licentiousness, had led to

quarrels with his chief that culminated in his summary dismissal (autumn 1744). His sojourn in Venice had sufficed to give him a passionate devotion to Italian music, and to start him on that process of political speculation which terminated in the publication of his *Contrat social.*

He returned to Paris at the end of 1744, penniless and embittered. His furious attacks upon the Comte de Montaigu merely served to alienate his former acquaintances, and he found himself shunned by the great world. His enthusiastic advocacy of Italian music (soft and sensuous), and his vehement condemnation of French music (formal and mechanical), intensely irritated the Parisians, and caused dislike of him to approach the verge of physical violence. In vain he strove for some five years (1744–49) to rehabilitate himself in Society. He frequented such *salons* as continued to receive him; but he was socially impossible—shy, awkward, self-conscious, sensitive, quick to give and take offence, wholly lacking in the grace of behaviour and the sparkle of conversation necessary for success in that world of etiquette and epigram. He wrote an opera, *Les Muses galantes*; but though such talent as he possessed was undoubtedly musical, he had too little technical knowledge and too little capacity for systematic work to produce anything even tolerably good. Some of his compassionate acquaintances gave him secretarial occupation; but he found the regularity and the drudgery of the post irksome and threw it up. He sank into laziness and destitution.

Such happiness as he found in these distressful and unprofitable years he obtained when, quitting the *salons* of the great, where he was out of place and wretched, he frequented the taverns of the underworld and hobnobbed with the lost, with whom he had a natural affinity. In particular, about 1745, he struck up an acquaintance, which soon developed into cohabitation, with an illiterate and sensual barmaid, named Thérèse Levasseur, by whom he had five children—which children, since he could not afford to rear them, were at once sent anonymously to the asylum for foundlings, Rousseau himself never so much as setting eyes on any one of them.[1]

[1] There is no reason to doubt the existence of these children, although the mystery surrounding their fate has given rise to many curious controversies and speculations.

By the year 1749 it was abundantly clear that Rousseau was socially, economically, morally, and domestically a complete failure. If he had died then he would at once have passed into utter oblivion, like any other defunct pauper degenerate. Accident (the master determinant of his life), however, preserved him for a very different fate. Having vainly endeavoured to win the world by striving for it, he secured it by renunciation. When he ceased to run after Society, Society started to run after him.

4. *The Inspired Maniac* (1749–62). It happened by chance in October 1749 that he picked up a copy of the *Mercure de France* which contained an announcement that the Academy of Dijon offered a prize for an essay in answer to the question " Has the progress of sciences and arts contributed to corrupt or purify morals? " The Academy probably expected that the successful essay would be a schoolboy dissertation on conventional lines glorifying the advance of civilisation. But Rousseau perceived, as by a flash of inspiration, that a very much more original and effective treatise could be constructed by taking the opposite view; that an exceedingly strong case could be made out for the assertion that morals had deteriorated since the artless and unscientific state of nature had been abandoned; and that this was the case which it would best suit his temper to state and argue. For the presentation of this proposition to his mind revealed to him in a lucid instant how deep was his hatred and detestation of the polite Society which scorned and rejected him; which laughed at his gaucheries and caused him the most acute misery; which refused to redress his wrongs or recognise his pretensions. He was suffering from what in the psychological jargon of to-day is called an ' inferiority complex,' and he saw an opportunity for revenge upon his superiors—viz., the fine ladies of the *salons* and the proud scholars of the *Encyclopædia*. Ideas, inflamed by long-suppressed passion, crowded and jostled in his congested brain; the effort to catch them and clothe them in words raised his blood to fever heat. In a frenzy of inspired mania he poured forth from the depths of his infuriated heart a tremendous indictment of the society in which he lived. Man is by nature good, he said. In his primitive condition he was happy and innocent. The

misery and corruption prevalent in the modern world are the consequences of so-called 'civilisation'—that is to say, of the increase of baneful knowledge and the excessive gratification of sense. To recover felicity man must return to the simple life.

Rousseau's first discourse not only won the proffered prize, it made a tremendous sensation in the artificial Society of the Age of Reason. It was the first rumble of the Revolution. Numerous replies, in which the obvious was emphasised, were penned—men so mighty (intellectually) as Lessing and (socially) as King Stanislaus of Poland, father-in-law of Louis XV of France, rushing into the fray in defence of a maligned civilisation. To these replies Rousseau wrote rejoinders, each more violent and extreme than its predecessor, and the net results of the wordy conflict were three: first, he vastly improved his literary style; secondly, he displayed himself as an exceedingly skilful, but entirely unscrupulous, controversialist, quick to discover the joints in his opponent's armour, and wholly merciless in driving his weapon home; and, thirdly, he was constrained not only to clarify his once muddy thought, and to commit himself to the defence of dogmas which at first he had not contemplated, but also to change his mode of life and to conduct himself in a manner consonant with his newly developed principles.

In 1750, in short, under the pressure of controversy and in the fervour of his novel faith, he passed through a process analogous to religious conversion, and emerged as a new anti-social creature. He severed his connexion with the great; he forsook the assemblies of the clever; he discarded the garments of polite Society and assumed the costume of the artisan; he sold his watch as an unnecessary product of craft; he declined gifts; he went to live with Thérèse in a slum, and earned a scanty living by copying music—mostly wrong.

In his new character as Man Friday in the Ile-de-France he excited far more interest and attention than he had done when he was striving to pose as a denizen of the great world. His boorish manners exactly accorded with the *rôle* of the simple savage in the state of nature which he was trying to play. Mme d'Epinay called him her "bear," and brought her

friends to see him as though he had been an exhibit in a zoological garden. He got numerous orders for music-copying from persons of high degree who were not in the least concerned whether the copying was done accurately or otherwise.

For six years (1750–56) this state of things continued. Meantime, however, his mind was seething with new ideas, and not a few of them he put into writing. In 1754, in particular, he penned his second *Discours*, the subject being "The Origin of Inequality." This discourse, well says Professor C. E. Vaughan,

> was and still remains the most complete expression of the revolt against human law and human convention—of the craving for a return to simple and freer conditions, for a renewal of man's communion with God and Nature—which was to breathe a new life into the thought, the imagination, the social ideals, of the civilised world.

The purport of the discourse was (i) that the origin of inequality was the institution of private property, and (ii) that for inequality there is in the nature of things no justification whatsoever. It is in this effusion that occurs that exaltation and glorification of the primitive state of nature that was to exert so powerful an influence upon the minds of the victims of an over-elaborated and decadent civilisation. Man in his original state of innocence, according to Rousseau, wandered naked in the woods, happy, healthy, care-free, solitary, peaceful, content. The fall came when he, tempted by the devil of cupidity, began to appropriate things (and in particular land) for himself; began to associate with his fellow-appropriators for the defence of his property; and began to organise states and governments for the more effective exploitation of his still innocent and impecunious neighbours. The whole thing was a wild fantasy of an undisciplined and exasperated imagination; but it made an immense appeal to a disillusioned and disgusted generation. It was, says M. Jules Lemaître, "the most extravagant, the most revolutionary, of all his works, the most pregnant, after the *Contrat social*, with future and fatal consequences."

This same seminal period saw also the publication of another work, strangely different from the second *Discours*,

yet equally important as a manifestation of his thought. This was his (misnamed) article on political economy in the fifth volume of the great French *Encyclopædia* which Diderot and his friends—amid many perils from an obscurantist and persecuting Church—were then issuing. It appeared in November 1755. In this article—which anticipates in many respects its more famous successor, the *Contrat social*—Rousseau recognises and accepts the institution of private property, admits the naturalness of society and the necessity of government, formulates a theory of the State which is essentially organic, adumbrates his conception of the sovereignty of the people, and, above all, propounds (more clearly and effectively than in any other of his works) his great and most original idea, his doctrine of the general will. That the intense and anarchic individualism of the second *Discours* and the incipient collectivism of the *Encyclopædic* article could have flourished unharmonised, side by side, in the same mind at the same time, and could have received expression in two almost simultaneous coherent works is one of the many mysteries that surround Rousseau's curiously ambiguous personality at this date.

In 1756 the kindness of some of his friends enabled him to leave Paris (where he was increasingly unhappy) and take up his abode in the country (where for a time he went delirious with delight). For six years he dwelt in or near the forest of Montmorency, a dozen miles or so from Paris; first, at the Hermitage (1756–57), lent to him by Mme d'Epinay; secondly, at Mont Louis (1757–62), placed at his disposal by M. Mathas, Procurator-Fiscal; with intervals at the "Little Castle" of the Duke of Luxemburg.[1] These six years, in spite of the fact (or even because of the fact) that in his unhealthy solitude he fell a victim to erotomania, and was for a time in the possession of an unclean devil, were years of immense productivity. They were, indeed, the cardinal years of his literary activity. Seething simultaneously in his mind, and published almost at the same time, were his *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), his *Émile* (1762), and his *Contrat social* (1762)—his three greatest works;

[1] During almost the whole of his life Rousseau lived in houses provided for him, rent free, by other people.

works that made an astounding sensation at the time of their publication, and works that have continued to be read in countless editions and innumerable translations down to the present day; works which, almost unsupported, sufficed to turn the Age of Reason to irrational sentiment, to charm *Encyclopædic* atheism into emotional deism, to convert passive obedience to malevolent despotism into a passionate enthusiasm for liberty, equality, and fraternity.

La Nouvelle Héloïse caused the fashionable world to weep to an extent which had no parallel until that notable day when the walrus (in company with the carpenter) beheld the quantities of sand that constitute the seashore. Weeping was a new sensation for the fashionable world, which was bored to death with gaiety, and it immensely enjoyed it. Rousseau touched the height of his popularity in 1761: he was visited in his forest seclusion by peers of the realm and princes of the blood, and still more frequently by their ladies. He was lionised and adored, his strange costumes, boorish manners, and unconventional utterances being regarded as manifestations of the unspoiled simplicity of his nature.

Very different, however, was the reception given to *Émile*, which dealt on highly original and novel lines with the problem of education. This book outraged the Church, first, by removing the training of the child out of the hands of the clergy; secondly, by prohibiting any teaching of religion until the period of adolescence; and, thirdly, by formulating a creed for use in pedagogy from which every distinctive article of Christian dogma was omitted—a sort of sentimental deism for sunny days dictated by the heart to the head. The Archbishop of Paris charged against the book and accused its author of heresy; the Sorbonne denounced it; the Parlement condemned it, and ordered the arrest of the writer; and—most devastating blow of all—the Government of Geneva consigned it to the flames. Rousseau's aristocratic patrons, alarmed at the ecclesiastical, academic, and legal hullabaloo, and fearing that if he were arrested they would be compromised, advised him to run away. He never needed to be told more than once to run away. He went; and, being denied an asylum at Geneva, at Berne, and at other Swiss cities, at last came to rest, under

the protection of Frederick the Great of Prussia, at Môtiers, in Neuchâtel (summer of 1762).

5. *The Hunted Fugitive* (1762–78). Of the remaining sixteen years of his life—his second period of vagabondage—there is little need here to say much. It was a period of deepening gloom, failing health, broken spirit, haunting terrors, paralysing illusions, accumulating despair. His sufferings and his suspicions unhinged his mind, and he had recurrent fits of sheer lunacy. It was during this period, and in the midst of one of his attacks of madness, that he visited England and had his famous quarrel with David Hume (1766–67). It was also during this period that he wrote those works of genius tinged with insanity, his *Confessions*, his *Dialogues*, and his *Reveries*. So, too, was it at this time, during more lucid intervals, that (having been consulted) he framed model constitutions for Corsica (just emancipated from Genoa) and for Poland (anxious to avoid partitionment by reform)—constitutions (never put into operation) remarkable for nothing so much as the total disregard displayed in them for all the abstract principles propounded in his theoretical works on politics.

Having lived in a dozen different places—but mainly in Paris—he moved finally, in May 1778, to Ermenonville, and there, in a cottage lent to him by the Marquis de Girardin, on July 2 he died.

III

The writings of Rousseau appear at first sight to consist of a mass of contradictions. In his *Discours*, in *Émile*, and in the opening chapters of the *Contrat social*, for instance, he displays himself as an extreme individualist, a passionate devotee of anarchic freedom, a mourner over lost liberty, an enemy of anything and everything that would restrain the solitary soul's uttermost eccentricity. On the other hand, in his *Political Economy* and in the later sections of the *Contrat social* he advocates a collectivism so complete as to establish the unqualified authority of the State over the citizen—an authority so comprehensive as to include the infliction of the death penalty for nonconformity to the civic religion.[1]

[1] *Contrat social*, Book IV, Chapter 8.

Similarly, in some works he exalts and glorifies the pre-social state of nature, while in others he idealises the fully organised and highly developed state of political society. He denounces art and yet writes operas. He emphasises the fundamental importance of the family and the supreme need to maintain the purity of all its institutions, and yet he lives with a woman to whom he is not married and he abandons all his children as soon as they are born. He advocates in *Émile* an education of an almost entirely negative kind, in which the prime function of the tutor is to prevent anything from interfering with the free operation of nature on the adolescent mind; whereas in the constitutions which he framed for the government of Corsica and of Poland he insists on the necessity of a State-controlled education intensely positive and directed deliberately to civic ends. He was a recluse, yet an ardent politician; a lover of humanity, yet a misanthrope; a man at once of ecstatic piety and of gross sensuality; a patriot and a cosmopolitan; an abstract logician replete with impracticable theories and a man of affairs with a shrewd eye to possibilities—and so on indefinitely. He was, in short, to all appearance, a mass of contradictions.

A study of the numerous commentaries that have been written upon the works of Rousseau during the past century and a half not only confirms the fact of his inconsistency, but also tends to engender the conviction that his contradictions are so serious and so bewildering as to baffle all attempts at harmonisation. Space, of course, fails to deal with them at length. Two examples must suffice. First, as to Rousseau's individualism. On the one side, M. Henri Sée (following M. Henri Michel) says:

> C'est une conception individualiste, presque anarchiste, qui a inspiré le *Discours sur l'inégalité*. Mais, dans le *Contrat social*, Rousseau, en dépit des apparences, reste individualiste. Il se préoccupe aussi et surtout d'assurer à l'individu le plein développement de sa liberté, et ce sera l'organisation elle-même, ce sera le pacte social qui garantira aux citoyens le maximum de liberté. C'est en vertu de son individualisme que Rousseau a le premier nettement dégagé la doctrine démocratique de la souveraineté populaire.[1]

[1] H. Sée, *L'Evolution de la pensée politique en France au XVIIIème siècle* (1925), p. 146.

On the other side, Professor C. E. Vaughan (who has rendered to all students of Rousseau an inestimable service by the publication of his magnificent edition of Rousseau's political writings) gives it as his mature opinion:

> Strike out the *Discours sur l'inégalité* with the first few pages of the *Contrat social*, and the individualism of Rousseau will be seen to be nothing better than a myth.[1]

So much for Rousseau's individualism and the irreconcilable divergence of opinion to which his statements respecting man and society have given rise.

A second example may be found in the antagonistic views of critics as to the position of the idea of a social contract in his political system. Professor Vaughan regards it as secondary and non-essential, and regrets that its irrelevant intrusion should have diverted the attention of students from the really fundamental matters of the sovereignty of the people and the supremacy of the general will.[2] Professeur René Hubert, on the contrary, in a brilliant monograph on the relation between Rousseau and the Encyclopædists, maintains that the social contract, which furnishes the title to Rousseau's most important book, is the very centre and keystone to the whole structure of his political fabric.[3]

The sum of the matter seems to be that Rousseau from time to time, and even at the same time,[4] uttered opinions diametrically opposite to one another concerning the individual and the State, concerning liberty and equality, concerning toleration and persecution, concerning primitive man and civilised society, and concerning countless other matters. He was an unsystematic thinker, untrained in formal logic. He was an omnivorous reader with undeveloped powers of assimilation. He was an emotional

[1] C. E. Vaughan, *Political Writings of Rousseau* (1915), vol. i, p. 1. Similarly he contends in his introduction to the *Contrat social* (1918) that "Rousseau is the consistent enemy of individualism" (p. xiii), and that "those who have found in Rousseau the champion of political individualism are wholly mistaken" (p. xviii).

[2] *Cf.* C. E. Vaughan, *Political Writings*, vol. i, p. 235, and *Contrat social*, p. lx.

[3] R. Hubert, *Rousseau et l'Encyclopédie* (1928), pp. 61, 87, 127–134.

[4] The second *Discours* and the article on *Political Economy* were composed simultaneously, as also were *Émile* and the *Contrat social*.

enthusiast who spoke without due reflection. He was an irresponsible writer with a fatal gift for epigram.[1]

His cosmos of ideas evolved itself extremely slowly out of a chaos of incongruous elements, and never did he succeed in giving a coherent exposition of the whole. The basal factor in all his thought was the Bible, which was, indeed, the foundation of all Genevan education; it will be recollected that one of the dreams of his youth was to become a Calvinistic preacher, and that one of the earliest of his attempts to find a career was his effort to qualify for the Catholic priesthood. Theology, as he learned it in his infancy, was, whether consciously or not, the master principle of all his speculation. To the scheme of salvation as propounded by the pastors of Geneva he gradually added the political philosophy of Locke, the theory of sovereignty of Hobbes, the *étatisme* of Plato, and the relativity of Montesquieu. The result was an appalling jumble; but ultimately it sorted itself out into a system with some approach to coherence. With the Bible as key let us seek to discern the main features of this system.

The Bible begins and the Bible ends with the picture of an ideal state, a Golden Age. On the one hand, the Old Testament seer gazing backward over the history of his race beholds through the mists of antiquity a garden planted eastward in Eden by the Lord, wherein the ancestors of humanity in primitive innocence live amid simple plenty a life of continual delight. On the other hand, the New Testament evangelist has an apocalyptic vision of a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, into which are gathered the hosts of the redeemed, and wherein once again—the sinful earth having been consumed with fire—purity and happiness reign supreme. Paradise lost and Paradise regained—that is the summary of the history of mankind according to the Scriptures. The way in which Paradise was lost and the method by which it may be regained—that is the burden of Christian theology. Rousseau, brought up in a city dominated by dogma, and always interested in religion, had a mind definitely cast in the theological mould. Even when he abandoned Christianity and became a Deist he

[1] The opening sentence of the *Contrat social*—"L'homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers"—has probably done more than any other misstatement to put readers off the track of the main argument of the book.

continued to think in terms of Paradise lost and Paradise regained. His political system, in short, is the rationalised plan of salvation; its essential factors are (i) the primitive state of innocence, (ii) the fall, (iii) the condition of sin and misery, (iv) the mode of redemption, (v) the new state of virtue and felicity. Let us briefly survey each of these factors in turn.

IV

1. *The State of Nature.* The second *Discours*, on the origin of inequality, is the Genesis of Rousseau's rationalised and secularised scripture. In it he depicts his intensely individualistic Garden of Eden, in which the noble savage, that ideal creature of eighteenth-century imagination, lives his simple, sinless, happy, and careless existence. He is an essentially solitary being, content to exist without any sort of society; he wears no clothes and feels no need of them; he has no property and does not want any; he finds his scanty necessities amply supplied by the lavish bounty of nature. He is devoid of knowledge of both good and evil; he is free from most of the diseases of civilisation, and he has no consciousness of the approach of death. There are no restrictions on his perfect liberty; his equality with his fellows is complete. Rousseau says:

> In this primitive state men had neither houses, nor huts, nor any kind of property whatever; every one lived where he could, seldom for more than a single night; the sexes united without design, as accident, opportunity, or inclination brought them together. . . . The produce of the earth furnished them with all they needed, and instinct told them how to use it.

2. *The Fall.* This is explained in the same seminal discourse. It was due to the growth of inequality; inequality was due to the abandonment of solitude for society; and the institution of society was due to the establishment of private property.

> The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying "This is mine," and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many

> crimes, wars, and murders; from how many horrors and misfortunes might not anyone have saved mankind by pulling up the stakes or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: "Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to no one."

Perhaps, we may suggest, the reason why this prophylactic speech was never uttered was the difficulty, in the absence of society, of summoning a public meeting; and the difficulty, before the evolution of language, in expressing such advanced ideas. In any case, however, private property, once having intruded itself, gave rise to inequality, generated jealousy and strife, led to the enactment of law, the organisation of police, and all the paraphernalia of government. Man's primitive freedom was wholly lost, and in its place was substituted a tyranny of the rich over the poor.

3. *The Condition of Sin and Misery.* Rousseau had no occasion to draw upon his imagination for a description of the condition of sin and misery into which (from whatever cause) mankind had fallen. He had but to look around him at the peasantry of France; he had but to recall his own experiences in his years of vagabondage. On all sides he saw wretchedness, violence, crime, disease. Why, he asks, when men saw the consequences of the Fall did they not return to the blissful state of nature once again? Why did they not do so, even in his own day? Ah, that was impossible! The gate of the Garden of Eden was closed, and an angel with a flaming sword prevented all approach. No longer were there forests wherein the noble savage could run wild; no longer was the population of the world so small that solitude for each and all was feasible; no longer could clothes be dispensed with without embarrassment and inconvenience; never again could the habits of civilisation be discarded, the knowledge of good and evil be forgotten, the fear of death eliminated. The Fall having taken place, and its consequences being ineradicable, the New Jerusalem must be something wholly different from the Garden of Eden. It must recognise the existence of society; it must accommodate itself to science; it must admit of the continuance of private property; it must allow for advance of the arts and crafts of civilisation. How could this New Jerusalem be achieved?

4. *Redemption by Means of the Social Contract.* The problem to be faced was this: How could pristine liberty be recovered without the abolition of law; how could equality be restored without the surrender of property; how, in short, could individualism be harmonised with communalism; how could anarchic man and organised society be reconciled the one to the other? Rousseau found himself in the presence of the fundamental problem of political science—viz., the definition of the relation of personal freedom to collective authority. It is a problem analogous to that great culinary crux: How can omelettes be made without breaking eggs? He himself thus states the case:

> The problem is to find a form of association that will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.[1]

Rousseau's solution to this problem is the social contract. The social contract, then—as M. Hubert rightly perceived, but as Professor Vaughan failed to perceive—is central to Rousseau's scheme of social salvation, and is as indispensable to it as is the Cross to Christianity. The process by which the social contract is concluded is, indeed, closely modelled upon that by which conversion is accomplished and salvation attained in the Church. It involves a complete kenosis, or divestment of all individual rights, and regeneration as a member of a new communal personality. The old man with all his works is put off; the new man, the *moi commun*, is put on; a novel creation is effected; a political miracle is performed. Rousseau thus describes the process. The individuals who propose to transform themselves into a community meet together and simultaneously make the great surrender in the following terms: "Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and in our corporate capacity we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole." This involves, Rousseau emphasises, "the total alienation of each associate together with all his rights to the whole community." It is an abnegation as complete as that which St Elizabeth, or any

[1] *Contrat social*, Book I, Chapter 6.

other sinner, ever made on admission to the community of the redeemed.

He adds:

> At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly contains votes, and receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life, and its will. This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons, formerly took the name of *Cité*, and now takes that of *Republic* or *Body Politic*. It is called by its members *State* when passive, *Sovereign* when active, and *Power* when compared with others like itself. Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of *People* and severally are called *Citizens* as sharing the sovereign power, and *Subjects* as being under the laws of the State.[1]

It will be at once recognised that this body politic of Rousseau is precisely the great Leviathan of Hobbes without its head. It is a body in which personality is completely transmuted into citizenship.

5. *The New Social State.* The main portion of the *Contrat social* is devoted to the task of unfolding the implications of the great transformation effected by the conclusion of the compact and by the consequent creation of the new communal organism. It might well be designated *The Gates Ajar*; it provides us with peeps into Rousseau's rationalised Paradise regained; it reveals to us the headless Leviathan and the city wherein he is supreme.

The first-fruit of the compact is, of course, the establishment of the sovereignty of the people; and to this conception of popular sovereignty Rousseau devotes a great many chapters of his book.[2] To us of the twentieth century the conception is—thanks largely to Rousseau himself—familiar enough; it is axiomatic to every form of democracy. But to men of the eighteenth century, particularly in France; to men brought up on Bossuet and his dogmatic statement of the divine right of kings; to men reared in a society in which ecclesiastical immunity and feudal privilege placed the first and second estates on platforms high above the third—a society in which a majority of the people were serfs without any political power

[1] *Contrat social*, loc. cit.

[2] *Ibid.*, Chapters 7–9; Book II, Chapters 1–12.

whatsoever, and with few but the most elementary legal rights—to men of the eighteenth century, I say, Rousseau's great idea was revolutionary in the extreme. He boldly claims for the people, organised as a community and become a living whole, all those immense prerogatives and powers which Hobbes assigns to the despot, the great Leviathan, to whom in his visionary scheme the people, emerging from the state of nature, have surrendered themselves. He contends, as against Hobbes, that the people cannot, even if they wish, divest themselves of their sovereignty. "I hold," he says, "that sovereignty, being nothing less than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated; and that the sovereign, who is no less than a collective being, cannot be represented except by himself." [1] And this inalienable and unrepresentable power is indivisible, illimitable, and in its proper sphere infallible. "The social compact gives the body politic absolute power over all its members." [2]

It would at first sight appear that this despotic monster, the many-headed multitude, is not less to be hated and dreaded by the liberty-loving individual than the unmitigated tyrant envisaged by Hobbes. But Rousseau sets to work to show that this is not the case. The State is an organism, he contends; it possesses a personality; it is characterised by a corporate mind, a communal conscience, and, above all, by a general will. The essence of its sovereignty resides in this general will, and to the formation of this general will every individual contributes. Hence this general will of the community is the real will of every one of its constituent members. The general will is not the mere algebraical sum of the separate individual wills of the citizens; these wills in matters that concern the State have ceased to exist. It is the unitary will of the new body politic.

> There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter considers only the common interest, while the former takes private interests into account, and is no more than a sum of particular wills.[3]

This conception of the general will as the single and simple volition of the body politic regarded as a living entity is

[1] *Contrat social*, Book II, Chapter 1. [2] *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.
[3] *Ibid.*, Chapter 3.

Rousseau's great contribution to political philosophy. It postulates an organic theory of the State, and it inevitably leads to a collectivist and even socialistic conclusion. It is, indeed, the source and origin both of the Hegelian system of politics, which culminated in the lectures of Treitschke, the ravings of Bernhardi, and the Great War; and also of the Marxian system of economics, which had issue in the dictatorship of the proletariat and Bolshevic communism. Rousseau gives a good deal of attention to it in the chapters relating to sovereignty in his *Contrat social*; but his fullest exposition of its characteristics and limitations is embodied in his article on political economy. It is from this that we learn (i) that "the body politic taken as a whole may be regarded as an organised living body, resembling that of man"; (ii) that "the body politic is also a moral being possessed of a will," and that "this general will, which tends always to the preservation and welfare of the whole and of every part, is the source of the laws," and that it "constitutes for all the members of the State, in their relations to one another and to it, the rule of what is just or unjust"; (iii) that "the most general will is always the most just," and that "the voice of the people is, in fact, the voice of God"; (iv) that "the general will is always for the common good"; and (v) that "the general will is always on the side which is most favourable to the public interest," so that "it is needful only to act justly to be certain of following the general will."

Here, it is obvious, Rousseau is beginning to argue in a circle: the general will is the standard of justice; he who acts justly necessarily conforms to the general will! Is there, or is there not, a standard of justice, a moral law, extraneous to the general will? This ethical difficulty is not the only one in which Rousseau finds himself involved. How can the maintenance of individual freedom be reconciled to the assertion of the authority of the general will of the body politic? Rousseau replies: "In order that the social contract may not be an empty formula it tacitly includes the undertaking, which alone can give force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body," and he adds the amazing remark: "This means nothing less than that he will be forced

to be free." Now to be thus forced to be free is in practice precisely the same thing as being forced to obey. In other words, in order to make the omelette of the State the egg of liberty has had to be broken. Rousseau has failed to solve completely the problem by which he, in common with all other political philosophers, was faced.

Nevertheless, he has made a permanently valuable contribution towards its solution, or, at any rate, to a working compromise between its opposite insolubilities; and there can be no question that just as he gathers into his system the ideas of most of his predecessors—*e.g.*, Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu—so he serves as the starting-point of much of the most fruitful political speculation of modern times—*e.g.*, that of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, T. H. Green, Bradley, Bosanquet.

If we are asked what are the most enduringly important of his social and political ideas, we might reply, first, the idea that the people is the ultimate source of all legitimate terrestrial authority; secondly, that government is merely the agent and delegate of the sovereign people; thirdly, that the common good is the criterion of sound legislation and satisfactory administration; fourthly, that the State is organic in nature and not a mere mechanism; fifthly, that the true basis of political obligation is consent, and hence, finally, that there is in the last resort no antagonism between freedom and authority, law and liberty, man and the State.

THE EDITOR

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VIII

HELVÉTIUS AND HOLBACH

IN the eighteenth century men were pleased to think that they lived in an age of reason, as in the nineteenth they thought they lived in an age of utilitarianism. In both cases they meant the same thing: that the theoretical and the practical are inextricably interwoven, and that human activity is guided always by human experience and at best by human science.

An historian who passed his boyhood in the basement of King's College has shown how our Constitution has been reformed almost beyond recognition by the application of the principle that the only justifiable aim and object of government is the realisation of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But that utilitarian principle, wielded with such effect by Bentham and the Mills and their friends, was far from being a British nineteenth-century invention. It was made in France. It is the greatest contribution that the French eighteenth century has made to human thought, and it is to the Encyclopædists, Helvétius and Holbach, that we owe it.

Exactly as in the case of Rousseau, it is with the third quarter of the eighteenth century that we are concerned—the twenty-eight years that elapsed between the publication, in 1748, of Montesquieu's miscellany on the *Wit and Wisdom of the Laws*, and the completion, in 1776, of the *Wealth of Nations*, which Adam Smith had begun in Paris ten years before—the twenty-eight years of labour and of friendship that began with the issue of Diderot's *Encyclopædia Prospectus* in 1750, and ended with the publication of a collective translation of the works of Seneca, the philosopher in whom the *philosophes* of Paris loved to find their prototype and exemplar. They were the years that saw the French empire in the New World destroyed and the English empire tottering to its fall

—in Northern Europe feudal and clerical Poland threatened with extinction by enlightened and benevolent despots—in France the Jesuits expelled by the Parlement, and the *parlements* suppressed by the Court.

The first half of this period was dominated by the personality of Diderot and the struggle for the publication of his *Encyclopædia*. During the latter half of this period Diderot sank into a mysterious silence, while an enormous number of irreligious works were being published surreptitiously, all of them marked by the same earnestness of tone, and nearly all of them traced back, forty years later, to Holbach and the Encyclopædists who assembled at his house or at Helvétius's.

These books were the logical outcome of the principle laid down by Diderot in editing the *Encyclopædia*. He wrote:

> The aim of an encyclopædia is to bring together the knowledge scattered over the face of the earth; to lay its general system before the men with whom we live, and to transmit it to those that will come after us, so that the labours of past ages may not be labours useless to the ages that will follow; so that our children will know more, and so that they may at the same time be greater in virtue and in happiness; and so that we may not die without deserving well of mankind.

But in spite of this desire to add to the social value of the work by systematising all knowledge, the *Encyclopædia* did not and could not present a consistent view of life. It was, as Diderot said himself, the work of "a group of specialists engaged each on his own portion, and united only by the common interest of mankind and by a feeling of mutual tolerance." On the editor fell the self-imposed and thankless task of linking together the chain of knowledge, so that it looked like a consistent whole. He had to tone down the inconsistency of Catholics, unitarians, deists, sceptics, and atheists. He had to harmonise mediæval theological dogma and modern scientific experience. He did it, but only with his tongue in his cheek. Hence nothing more natural than the desire to substitute a natural system for this artificial systematisation; and the task that was above the powers and beyond the dreams of the Encyclopædists as a whole was accomplished by Holbach, aided perhaps by Diderot and one or two of his closest friends.

Alongside this continuity of theme went a continuity of action. Between 1751 and 1757 seven volumes of the *Encyclopædia* appeared, more or less regularly, under the nominal editorship of an Academician, and with the approval and permission of the Crown.

But in 1758 Diderot's friend Helvétius, burning with a desire to outrival Montesquieu, published his obscene and blasphemous masterpiece, *Mind*.[1] It was so explicitly obscene and so implicitly blasphemous that it was immediately pirated all over Europe, twenty different editions appearing between August and December. Under the pressure of the Queen's Jesuit confessor, Helvétius's mother forced him to recant. Next day the Parlement of Paris, not to be outdone by its Jesuit enemies, ordered Helvétius's book to be burnt, and at the same time it appointed a special committee to inquire into the orthodoxy of the *Encyclopædia*. So as to avoid friction, the Crown hastened to withdraw its approval and permission, and the completion of the *Encyclopædia* was delayed till 1765, when the last ten volumes were brought out surreptitiously, with false title-pages.

Helvétius learnt the lesson that he had better not publish anything else until he was himself dead and his daughters safely married. Holbach had fewer scruples and less desire for fame even of the posthumous kind; so he published his manuscripts under the names of dead men or foreigners or nobody at all. The deception was great, as some of these works were actually written by dead men or foreigners. It was five generations since Epicureanism had been revived in France by Gassendi; two generations since scepticism had been popularised by Bayle and pantheism by Spinoza; and anticlericalism was then, as always, one of the dominant characteristics of an important part of French society. The private collections of the eighteenth century, many of them now incorporated in the public libraries of France, abound in highly heterodox works written by distinguished French scholars and scientists, copied out by hand, circulated from friend to friend, and seldom openly attributed to their authors until death had put them beyond the reach of danger. Ten of the works printed by Holbach between 1761 and 1772

[1] *Infra*, section III.

represent various stages of this process, the oldest of them dating from twenty years before his birth, and the latest being written by men he must often have sat next to at dinner. Ten others, printed between 1767 and 1772, were translated from the English: first came a number of Whig attacks on priest-craft, published during the Church-and-State conflict that marked the end of our Augustan Age; then some more serious works, Collins on prophecies and Woolston on miracles; the *Philosophical Letters* in which Toland had outlined a system of atheistic materialism for the edification of Frederick the Great's grandmother; and, above all, a short essay which had been omitted from the French translation of Hobbes's collected works, and which the Encyclopædists agreed to regard as one of the "masterpieces of the mind of man"—the *Treatise on Human Nature*, in which the young Hobbes, on the eve of his flight to France, had brought the vagaries of human conduct within the scope of scientific determinism, thus laying down the psychological basis on which he himself, Locke, Hartley, and Collins had already built in England, and on which Diderot, Helvétius, Holbach, Condillac, and Rousseau were now building in France. Fifteen other religious and political works, bringing the total up to thirty-five, seem to have originated in Holbach's own study. Starting with the almost purely destructive *Christianity Unveiled* (1761?),[1] his philosophy gradually developed until he reached the full-fledged positive materialism of the *System of Nature* (1770), which Voltaire reckoned "more eloquent than Spinoza";[2] then, leaving religious controversy on one side, and developing the constructive side of his theories, came the three works which Diderot recommended to the Empress Catherine for university use, the *System of Society* (1772), *Natural Politics* (1772), and *Universal Morality* (1776).[3]

All these works had to be printed abroad, at Amsterdam or London; but, once printed, they circulated fairly freely in France. A certain apprentice was sent to the galleys for selling a copy of one of these books to his master; but that is the only known instance of such severity. The *System of Nature* was burnt by the Parlement of Paris; but the Crown prosecutor was a friend of Voltaire; the indictment he drew

[1] *Infra*, section IV. [2] *Infra*, section V. [3] *Infra*, section VI.

reproduced all the most criminal passages of the book, and when the Parlement hesitated to make it public it was printed and published by special command of the King.

II

To realise fully the importance of these writings we must try to envisage the whole group of the Encyclopædists; for they constituted a group of thinkers comparable to the Benthamites or the early Fabians—a co-operative society for the production of social and political ideas. There was Father Morellet,[1] the free-trade economist, who was always tackling some problem of the moment; Turgot, the experienced administrator, who was gathering up these odds and ends of political economy into a general theory of the origin and distribution of wealth; Father Raynal, who put his name to the first great indictment of world-exploitation, the *Philosophical History of the East and West Indies*; Boulanger, the engineer and folklorist, who died young, but left behind him a gigantic work on the origin of religion and government; Naigeon, the literary executor of Diderot and Holbach, and the tutor of Holbach's children, whose translation of Lucretius suggests so plainly that it was in the philosophy of the classical world, away back behind the seventeen hundred years of Christianity, that these men of a liberal education found one of the chief sources of their inspiration. Twice a week, in the season, these and many other writers and men of science would hold their 'synagogue' round Holbach's dinner-table and in his *salon* in the new Rue Royale, or at Helvétius's house if he were in town, and there they would meet many of the leading lights of European Society. Hume went there almost as soon as he arrived at Paris, as secretary to the Embassy, and when he had returned home it was to Holbach that he wrote his fierce exposure of Rousseau's conduct. Adam Smith met Turgot there. Wilkes was a constant visitor, in his journeyings to and fro between the politicians of London and the courtesans of Italy. None was more welcome than the Shakespearean

[1] Pronounced like *mords-les*—" bite 'em "—and not like Morelly.

actor Garrick, whom Holbach once visited in London, and who used to keep Morellet supplied with the latest English economic writings. Beccaria, who had won sudden fame by his attempt to treat crime and punishment scientifically, was received with open arms by these men, who shared the same conception of human psychology.

Horace Walpole had to pretend he was deaf; Raynal and the others knew so much more about English colonies than he did. And many others, even among those who wrote for the *Encyclopædia*, similarly cut themselves off from the Encyclopædist circle. The breach with Rousseau became decisive when he refused to escort Mme d'Epinay to Geneva when her health gave way with nursing Mme Holbach; but that breach had its philosophical side—the Encyclopædists stood for the common-sense control of sentiment by reason, while the romantic Rousseau and his works were only too often the embodiment of sentiment run riot. All alike believed in nature, but Rousseau refused to approach it by the road of science. D'Alembert too deserted the *Encyclopædia* when it lost the favour of the Court: while Diderot and Holbach dreamed enthusiastically of the reign of the philosopher-king over an enlightened people, d'Alembert saw in science simply a means of alleviating the boredom of this wearisome world; a mathematician, he had little faith in the experimental sciences in general, and none whatever in political science. Then there was Dr Quesnay, the 'rural philosopher,' who sank to such dangerous word-play as to call a sovereign a *despot* because he *disposed* of supreme power, and a *joint landlord* because his revenue was derived ultimately from the soil. Like Rousseau and the Encyclopædists, he worshipped nature, but his conception of a natural order of things, that existed nowhere except in the intentions of divine Providence, left almost as many 'doubts' in the minds of reasonable men as in the mind of Mably. Holbach's ideal was less an inhuman and purely economic 'physiocracy' than a man-made and moral 'ethocracy,' to quote the title he gave to a little book he dedicated to Turgot and young Louis XVI at the time when there seemed some hope that they might reform the government of France.

Rousseau, d'Alembert, and the Physiocrats thus parted

company from the rest of the Encyclopædists, on account both of personal differences and of fundamental differences of social outlook; but the majority continued to gather together, attracted by the enthusiasm and vivacity of Diderot and by the good cheer offered by Holbach and Helvétius, the two "maîtres-d'hôtel de la philosophie." These men, who constituted the heart of the Encyclopædist movement, were united not only by personal ties, but by a common profession of dogmatic atheism, an equal openness to foreign influences, and especially to the influence of the most recent medical and chemical thought, and a general neglect and dislike of mathematics, which seriously lessened their importance as philosophers, but did not appreciably diminish their powers as social thinkers.

Helvétius was the grandson of a German-Dutch doctor who had made a fortune by introducing ipecacuanha into France, and the son of a Physician Royal, thanks to whose influence at the Court he had obtained a lucrative farmer-generalship. But at the period with which we are concerned he had given up State finance in disgust, after making a fortune out of it, and had settled down in the country as a benevolent landlord, a model husband, a perfect father, and a reformed rake. There he died of gout, in the presence of Holbach and other members of the circle, in the winter of 1771.

Baron Holbach was born in Germany, near Landau; he inherited property in Belgium; he studied science in Holland, at the University of Leyden, the greatest university of the Protestant world; he there learnt English and had Wilkes and Akenside for fellow-students. After the peace of 1748 he settled in Paris; he was naturalised a French subject; he married into a family of State financiers; and he obtained automatic ennoblement by investing £9000 (110,000 livres tournois) at 5 per cent. interest in the "Company of secretaries of the King and his household"—a position which gave him a certain standing at the Court, but exposed him to the occasional risk of forced loans. For the *Encyclopædia* he wrote three hundred articles, mainly on mineralogy and metallurgy, based on the latest German discoveries and industrial experiences. He outlived nearly all his friends and

enemies, not dying till the beginning of 1789; by then, however, gout and cholic and friendlessness had already put him out of action for more than ten years.

III

Holbach was the most prolific of the Encyclopædists, and his writings reflect admirably the problems of contemporary life and thought. Helvétius wrote far less; but by his very demerits he stimulated discussion and contributed to the development of utilitarian thought.

Following in the footsteps of Hobbes and Collins, Helvétius declared categorically that man acts in accordance with certain known and definite laws of nature. "If the physical world is subjected to the laws of movement, the moral world is no less subjected to that of interest." Then he proceeded to distinguish between public and private, general and individual, interest. The two interests were not necessarily opposed to each other—a planet follows two laws of movement at the same time: it turns on its own axis, and it turns round the sun. To harmonise the conflicting interests is the work of the moralist, because true morality consists in the service of the general interest, and not in the mere observance of religious prejudices. It is also the work of the legislator, because the general interest is only another name for the interest of the State or the government. Ethics is a frivolous pastime unless it is merged in politics; if he is to serve the general interest, the moralist ought to look at life from the legislator's point of view. The legislator ought to encourage true virtue by education—that is to say, by promising and by meting out punishment to those who disserve the State and rewards to those who serve it. What rewards? In bygone ages and in barbarous countries women; under modern conditions honours and wealth. Thus, by satisfying the personal desires of its servants, the State can be sure of their service.

Such is the essence of Helvétius's book on *Mind*. Because of his inability to think out what he meant by the State and by the specious phrase 'general interest,' he produced little more than a piece of Machiavellism. The best explanation

one can find for his excessive etatism is that his country was in the middle of the Seven Years War with Prussia.

After that war had ended in defeat Helvétius reiterated and re-emphasised most of his ideas in his posthumous book on *Man*. All men are equally capable of being made into dutiful servants of the State; the physiological distinctions that exist between them are of practically no importance, since they all have the same interests and the same senses, and all that they are depends on the appeal made to their passions and the impressions made on their five senses. In order, therefore, that all men may be led to harmonise their private passions with the general interest they should all receive the same education. As it is, their education is left to chance, and is too often in the hands of Papists, whose doctrines are doubtful, and who teach a mere local superstition—the only true and catholic religion being the science of legislation. Moreover, they should all be given equal opportunities of getting rich, and laws should be framed so as to prevent too great a capital being accumulated in too few hands—because money-getting is the chief stimulus to human activity, and it is disastrous for the human hive to be divided into two nations: drones who eat all the honey and die of boredom, and workers who die of starvation.

Helvétius thus showed himself an even better egalitarian than Rousseau, because he was a more consistent etatist and educationist; and, in spite of the studied lowness of his thought, he rivalled the greatest writers of his age as a contributor of words and phrases, and even of ideas, to the stock-in-trade of subsequent generations of publicists.

IV

Had Helvétius any use for the Christian religion? Was he a partisan of enlightened despotism, or of Parliamentarism? Had he any use for other social groupings in between the individual and the State? Did he think that society was held together simply by laws and legislation? To questions such as these his books return no straightforward answer.

Far different was the dogmatism of Holbach. He began by developing the distinction drawn by Helvétius between

religious and civic conceptions of morality. He opened his first book with the axiom: "A reasonable being ought to set before himself, in all his actions, his own happiness and that of his fellows." And he proceeded to judge and condemn all the religions of the world because they did not contribute appreciably to human happiness. Of course, he admitted that religion can in some cases minister to the satisfaction of this or that individual; but what he maintained was that this satisfaction was either useless or harmful to society. Instead of preaching the duties of man to man as something dictated by nature and by common sense, it made them part of the duties of man to God, with the result that many a man on becoming a disbeliever became at the same time a libertine. The most important duties of man to God consisted in prayer and praise, fasts and feasts, confession and communion—all of them socially useless. Add to these the ceremonies that accompany all the turning-points of life—baptism, marriage, extreme unction, and burial—and it was clear that in Christianity everything, sins included, contributed to the existence and turned to the profit of the priesthood. There thus existed in Christian countries two powers, miscalled the spiritual and the temporal, and in the long run priestcraft always proved stronger than statecraft. Scriptures were contradictory, tradition was doubtful, religious disputes were for ever arising, and, instead of getting on with their proper work, governments felt themselves bound to intervene in these frivolous discussions and to decide which opinions and which practices were most in accordance with the Divine Will. Rulers were thus able to gain to their side the spiritual power, and if they attended well enough to divine service they were able to save themselves the trouble of attending to the social services by which alone their existence was morally justified. They became intolerant, because how could they tolerate what they believed to be an abomination in the eyes of God? They would not allow their subjects to serve their country as soldiers or magistrates unless they could satisfy some test of orthodoxy,[1] and they tried to force them all into an artificial unity of belief. The result was always disunion: the Habsburgs had failed to crush the Lutherans of

[1] Holbach had not been allowed to purchase his sinecure of secretary of the King until the vicar of his parish certified that he had communicated the previous Easter.

Germany, and the Dutch Calvinists had shaken off their rule; one of the Stuarts had lost his head for trying to force his subjects into conformity with the Church of England; his son had lost his throne for trying to make them conform to the Church of Rome; and the French Huguenots had been driven into the hands of the enemies of France. But of course kings did not always obey the dictates of religion, and they sometimes became obstacles in the way of their people's salvation; so the Jesuits had preached tyrannicide, and Henry IV, the best of French kings, had been murdered. Thus government was reduced to a nullity, while religion was like an epidemic rampant. Compare the civil commotion it has caused with the good conduct it has inspired in men who would have been good in any case, and it was obvious to Holbach that the ill it has done is vast as the ocean, and the good as small as a drop of water.

This influence of religion on human society was no miracle; it could easily be explained by the two chief principles of contemporary psychology. According to one principle—the principle of sensation and association—the beliefs that govern human conduct are not innate ideas implanted in us by God or nature, but are, on the contrary, the product of education, confirmed by habit; governments can reform education and transform the habits of people, but they are not likely to do so, as rulers are themselves the victims of an education that prevents them from thinking for themselves, gives them no clear idea of their duties, and makes them attach supreme importance to things that do not matter. The other principle—the principle of utility—was that man seeks always his own happiness, and always tries to avoid misfortune; finding himself subject to the forces of nature, he has pictured nature as a divinity liable to human emotions, and has tried to appease it and gain its goodwill by human means; but modern science gives men other ideas of nature and suggests other means of attaining happiness.

V

The universe consists of matter and movement, the different forms of matter being essentially different forms of movement.

Everything that exists is composed of smaller units of matter, which tend constantly to fall apart and regroup themselves; but, for a while at least, they tend also to hang together, and science had recently given names to this tendency. In the physical world it was gravitation, molecular attraction, *vis inertiæ*. In the moral world, in the human body, it was called self-preservation or interest, and it was no doubt this same electromagnetic tendency that accounted for sexual attraction and friendship, and for the union of individuals in families and states.

Man is a material being who acts according to ineluctable laws; but, like every other material being, he has a way of acting that is all his own. What is more, men differ also among themselves, and this brings us to a second explanation of society; for diversity produces a natural division of labour, and puts us in a position of mutual dependence. Diversity means inequality; men are born unequal; society is founded on inequality; and Rousseau and Helvétius were both wrong. The elements on which this all-important inequality depends are essentially physiological; men differ in their bodily make-up, in their humours, in their energy, in the functioning of their brains and their nerves; and these natural differences are enhanced by differences of environment, food, drink, and clothing. Herein lies the possibility of progress—that is, of the material improvement of the human race. It is for medical science to show the way to bodily well-being; it is for kings and rulers to become the doctors of their people The soul of man is a function of his body; look after his body, and *ipso facto* his *moral* will improve.

There is also, according to Holbach, a certain way of acting that distinguishes mankind as a whole from other animals or machines. Thanks to the modifications effected in our brains by the movement of our nerves we know by experience that like causes produce like effects; and man is a reasonable animal in so far as he thinks and acts in accordance with this experience, in seeking to live and to live happily. Ethics and politics are sciences like any others; they are founded on the experience that man cannot live alone, that he has need of other people, and that others have need of him. It is in his interest to be sociable. Nature thus imposes on him

many duties, many social obligations; he is naturally bound by a social contract, pact, or covenant. But it often happens that his experience is not great enough, or that his reason works too slowly for him to act in a way that is really and durably useful to his fellows. This is where political science comes in; it must enlighten men on their true interests, and make them work together for the good of the social whole; in other words, the pact must be enforced by the sanctions of the law. A government is justified in making the law only in so far as it interprets the general will. Sovereigns are the representatives and servants of the people, and they reign only on condition that they facilitate and do not thwart the natural desire to live and be happy. The people have the right to change the form of government, and rulers who do more harm than good lose the right to be obeyed. The law ought to restrain the passions of the sovereign at the same time as those of the people; it ought to limit and define his powers; it ought to be, according to Montesquieu's definition, the embodiment of reason.

> It ought to aim at the general interest of society—that is to say, it ought to assure to the greatest number of citizens the advantages for which they are leagued together in society. These advantages are liberty, property, and security. Liberty means the possibility of doing for one's own happiness everything that does not militate against the happiness of one's fellows; for, in entering into a league, each individual has agreed not to exercise the part of his own natural freedom that might be prejudicial to that of others. Property means the possibility of enjoying the advantages which labour has procured to each member of society. Security means the certainty of being protected by the laws in the enjoyment of one's person and of one's property in so far as one observes faithfully one's engagements with society.

Nothing could show more clearly the source of Holbach's inspiration. Locke and the English Whigs were his masters in social theory, just as surely as Hobbes was his master in psychology. He rejected Rousseau's vision of direct democracy, sanctified intolerance, and the sovereignty of the people. He rejected Rousseau's hypothesis that all men are born good, as surely as he rejected the Pauline hypothesis that all men are born wicked. He reverted to his friend Seneca's common-sense point of view, that nature has made man

neither good nor bad. He is simply an animal or a machine—there is no difference—because, as Descartes said, an animal is a machine—an animal or a machine driven in the pursuit of happiness by various passions which are all equally natural. The justification of virtue is not that it is implanted in us all by nature, or that it is given to the elect among us by divine grace, but that experience shows all reasonable men that it is really and permanently useful to mankind.

This distinction made clear, Holbach shows himself as the most moral man under the sun. Far be it from him to say with Mandeville that vice is sometimes virtue, or with Helvétius that there is no such thing as vice for the loyal servant of the State. Virtue is always virtue, and vice vice. The only thing is that vice is perfectly natural, and virtue useless or suicidal, if society is so corrupt that virtue goes unhonoured and unrewarded, while vice leads to comparative happiness and well-being. Now that was the very thing that had happened, because governments did not do their duty. The Courts were the centres of the corruption of the peoples; they encouraged man's passion for dangerous futilities, and attached dishonour to useful occupations; they were deaf to the voice of experience, and prejudiced against the use of the reason; they regarded truth as dangerous, and falsehood and error as necessary to man's welfare both here and hereafter. In short, they discouraged virtue and encouraged vice. On moral grounds Holbach therefore launched out into as severe a criticism of the State as of the Church.

VI

Religion, he contended, was worse than useless, because primitive man had fallen in the fundamental error of personifying the forces of nature. Similarly governments had become a menace to moral and material well-being because they had failed to put limits on the passion for wealth, and because this passion was becoming increasingly dangerous with the rapid exploration and exploitation of the East and West Indies, or, as we should now say, with the development of commercial capitalism.

The evil was not beyond remedy, if only man looked the

facts in the face. One fundamental fact, brought home to eighteenth-century thinkers by Turgot and the French 'rural philosophers,' and enhanced in importance by the impossibility of foreseeing the imminence of the Industrial Revolution, was that the land was the material foundation of all society. Another fact, and a momentous one in the history of European thought—one which Locke, with his half-blind insight, was the first to enunciate—was that in the original state of nature property was justified in so far as it was the fruit of labour, and *only* to that extent.

Labour was the law of life, the chief of our duties towards our fellows, and the only way of justifying our existence. The work of all for the well-being of all was the essence of the social contract. But work was a painful duty from which men naturally shrank; they tried to appropriate to themselves the fruit of the labour of others; property was thus incessantly violated; and the unity of society and all social justice were destroyed by the struggle between a minority of rich 'never-sweats' and the immense majority of workers. Differences of wealth and rank would be justified if they were proportioned to differences in social usefulness; but hereditary distinctions were a pernicious abuse, an encouragement to idleness.

Justice is the supreme virtue, and is, like utility, a balance in which all social institutions should be weighed. It is a disposition to maintain men in the enjoyment of their rights, and to do for them all that we would that they should do for us. The rights of man consist in such use of liberty as is in conformity with justice; and, as liberty means freedom to work out our own happiness and well-being, a just State will allow the utmost possible liberty to its members. It will not tax their property without their own consent. It will not concern itself with their beliefs. It will leave them free to write what they like about the government, since government exists only for their good. The juster the government, the freer the people, the stronger the country. The nation would be happy, for the majority of the people would be able to satisfy their needs without overwork, and enlightened self-interest would encourage their public spirit and patriotism.

A man is free when he obeys just laws. He is a slave when he obeys the will or the whim of another man. Judged by

this standard, the kings of France are debonair despots, and the people are slaves, even though their chains are gilded. Nothing but the consent of the people can make them legitimate sovereigns, and such consent is given only in return for services rendered—in return for the fulfilment of the fundamental laws of the constitution, or, if such laws have never been framed, of the title-deeds which nature has engraved for ever in the heart of man. The nation has the right and the power to rise against its despots, to limit their powers, and, if need be, to dethrone them. But this resistance must come from the nation, and not from odd individuals; private citizens have the right to leave the country as *émigrés*, but not to plunge the country into disorder and oppose passion to passion, so that the last state is worse than the first. A revolution might be perfectly justified and exceedingly useful, but only if it was carried out as constitutionally as possible, with perfect cool-headedness, and under the guidance of virtuous and enlightened leaders.

In a well-governed country the government would devote itself, above all, to the condition of the common people—of the greatest number—for it is on *their* labour that society depends. It would allow them to enjoy the fruit of their labour. It would educate them, so as to prevent them from becoming the playthings of ambition and fanaticism. It would not expect them to rule themselves, but would allow them to make their wishes known by the voice of their representatives; for every class of useful citizens ought to be able to make itself heard. *How*, exactly? Holbach is not clear. He recognises the advantages of mixed monarchy; but he recognises also the corruption of English Parliamentarism. France too has had her *parlements*, until 1770, and Holbach is less averse from them than his friend Turgot; for in these "intermediary bodies," as Montesquieu had called them, the people had representatives of a kind, non-elected it was true, but none the less popular, as they alone stood between the people and the menace of Oriental despotism. It would be under the leadership of such organs as these that the people would be justified in forcing their will on the government.

The internal constitution of a country is only one of the conditions on which its happiness depends. Its attitude to-

wards foreign countries is another. Experience shows that the reasonable way of looking at foreign relations is to regard all the nations as members of "the great world-society," seeking their own well-being, but respecting the interests of each other at the same time. In fact, they might well codify their mutual obligations, and submit their disputes to a world-court. Instead of that, they live in a so-called state of nature, which is thoroughly unnatural because it is unsocial, unjust, and worse than useless. Governments neglect their own people in order to give all their attention to foreign affairs; they oppress their own people in order to oppress their neighbours and increase the number of their misruled subjects. In such a state of anarchy 'good faith' is a suicidal superstition, and an enlightened government often does well to break its word, when that means breaking an unjust treaty that has been forced upon it as the result of an unjust war. For nearly a century all the wars undertaken by Christian countries had been undertaken for the sake of commerce; the national debts accumulated as a result made the burden of taxation as heavy in peace-time as in time of war, while it gave rise to a new class of *rentiers* who lived without doing any useful work; finally, and in France more than in any other country, kings who could not raise revenue by other means farmed out the right to tax their subjects, in return for ready money; the great financiers set the tone for the whole society, and the people set out to imitate them and find a way of getting rich without working. Almost the whole society was thus demoralised. The taste for luxury was spreading. The nation was becoming dependent on a foreign trade in which thousands of useful lives were lost every year. The natives of non-Christian countries were being enslaved. The colonists who went out to the New World were themselves being exploited so unjustly that they would undoubtedly be driven to assert their freedom. And all the time, while the world was becoming a prey to the passion for money-getting, the moral and material welfare of the people was being neglected.

But nature had set limits to commerce, and this passion would destroy itself. Merchant-ridden States like Britain and Holland would go the way of Venice, Carthage, and Tyre, because they were too dependent on foreign countries. The

wisest attitude a government could adopt towards commerce would be to leave it severely alone—*laissez-faire*—and above all not to give monopolies to East India Companies. Bitter experience would drive men back to the land. Each country would produce as much as it could. The countries that were most industrious would export the most, and would thus force less industrious countries into dependence on them. Their wealth would increase, and would be spread equitably among the whole working population. By a moderate amount of work it would be possible to satisfy all the real needs of life. France would become an earthly paradise, a paradise of peasants, like the Italy of Virgil's dreams. Men would no longer regret the size of their families; home life would be a joy to the greatest number; the population would increase, helped by the building of hospitals and the improvement of sanitation; and, when it outgrew the productive power of the homeland, overseas colonisation would be justifiable, the colonists continuing to be citizens of the mother-country and retaining the same rights and the same duties as their fellow-citizens who remained at home.

Holbach was no Condorcet; he did not believe that progress was a straight line that ran from eighteenth-century France to infinity. He knew only too well that the moral world, like the material, is for ever in movement. No social order, just or unjust, could possibly be permanent. Everything that existed was marching steadily towards inevitable dissolution. No nation would ever enjoy perpetual bliss. But that universal tendency would not prevent man, in some countries, and for a while at least, from enjoying a period of well-being—because men have in them a longing for happiness and self-preservation. It was that possibility, sometimes faint, yet always real—for it is rooted in the nature of man—that ought to occupy the thoughts of statesmen and of all thinking citizens and well-wishers of the commonweal.

VII

Holbach was living and writing in a period of great uncertainty. Taught by Montesquieu and by other writers who had lived through the days of Law's bubble, to attach supreme

moral importance to the development of luxury, he saw well enough that capitalism had reached one of the turning-points of its development, and he is hardly to blame for the non-realisation of his prophecy. The main lines of subsequent social evolution may have been necessary and inevitable; but it is easier for us to see the inevitability from our end of the long chain of cause and effect than it was for him at his end to foresee it. Commercial exploitation was making possible the long-drawn-out industrial revolution in which we happen to be living, and this totally new turn given to human progress has made it impossible for any but a simpleton to see the world through Holbach's eyes. It has taken the bottom out of his economic theories, by making the nations of the world inextricably interdependent. It has provided an answer to his religious *impasse*, by creating conditions of life and death in which social preoccupations have inevitably triumphed over religious disputes as the dominant subject-matter of politics.

Holbach is dead, and his works are dead, but they have played their part in the intellectual and constitutional history of Christendom. Lord Shelburne went to Paris, and his librarian, Joseph Priestley, with him. They were welcomed by the Encyclopædists, and on their return to England Priestley, proud to have been told that he was the first intelligent Christian that had been seen in Paris for a long while, did his best to popularise their materialist psychology and ethics, but in as Christianised—or at least as unitarianised—a form as possible. Through this medium their thoughts filtered into English radicalism. But the French originals were not unknown; another *habitué* of Shelburne's house, young Bentham, undoubtedly knew Helvétius's work directly; and when Horne Tooke received presentation copies of Priestley's works he developed the habit of filling the margins with extracts from the far more logical *System of Nature*. It was the *System of Nature*, Helvétius, and Rousseau, who together, and in that order, led Godwin to start on the search for political justice. When Shelley had tried to convince Oxford of the necessity of atheism he set to work to translate that same *System of Nature*. But it was too late; it had already been translated. And an edition published in 1821, at the same time as an English version of Helvétius's *Mind*, by a Radical

bookseller who had been imprisoned for the part he played in the agitation of 1819, made Holbach's influence a serious rival to that of Paine, while others of his works, less definitely atheistic in tone, were brought out by Paine's leading disciple —a man who nevertheless enjoyed the support of Place and Bentham and the Mills—Richard Carlile. Thus Holbach, like Helvétius, played his part in the hundred years' struggle of the British Radicals against the dominant conceptions of government and religion.

In France itself the history of sober thought is clouded by the passions and personalities of the war and the Revolution. These men were not forgotten, but their ideas lost their clarity and distinction, and mingled all in a common stream. The Babouvists, in their last desperate attempt to effect a social and not merely a political revolution, were as incapable as Rousseau himself of distinguishing clearly between the communism of Morelly and Mably and the egalitarianism of Helvétius—both were equally revolutionary, and that was all that mattered. One of Holbach's books was reissued in the heat of '93, for the sake of its strict, stern conception of civic virtue; and another, when the Concordat was looming ahead, as a reminder of the dangers of priestcraft, dangers brought home to many a reformer and patriot by the recent religious civil war. After the deist despotism of Robespierre Naigeon republished all the philosophical articles of the *Encyclopædia*; he set Diderot and Helvétius in their place in world-thought, but let the anonymous Holbach fall into oblivion, probably for the sake of his widow and children. A catholic revival followed; but it bore in all its social thinking the marks of the Encyclopædist movement. The first generation tried to justify the Church and the Papacy on the ground of their social utility, an argument that Holbach had met in advance; and the second generation of neo-Catholics, fed on Rousseauism and accepting by implication the arguments of Rousseau's enemies, abandoned the standpoint of St Thomas, set the heart above the head, and gave up the attempt to harmonise their beliefs with the dictates of reason and science. At the same time Saint-Simon was proclaiming the social duties of industrialists; he saw things that the Encyclopædists had lived too soon to see, but they were the

masters who taught him the importance of labour, the relations between science and industry, and the co-operative nature of human society.

In Germany, in Masonic and philosophic circles, the first impulse was away from materialist conceptions of life; but in the eighteen-forties Arnold Ruge tried to bring together the new humanism of Feuerbach and Marx and the philosophy of the Encyclopædists; though how far Marx owed his materialist conception of life to Holbach and Helvétius, and his economics to Turgot, is one of the riddles of history. Ideas that had been new and strange in the eighteenth century had become common property in the nineteenth.

Man differs from other animals in the greater complexity of his social life, and in his greater self-consciousness. Political and social thought is his way of expressing his consciousness of the increasing complication of the conditions of his existence. As the conditions of life change, and as science pushes back the frontiers of knowledge and opens up new unknowns, our social and political ideas must also necessarily change. But through all these changes the thought of the Encyclopædists, Helvétius and Holbach, always retains its significance; for they were the founders of a tradition of which we are heirs; they were the forerunners of all of us who try to envisage social experience in a scientific though not unenthusiastic spirit, and to make our age an age not of blind passion, but of ordered progress enlightened by reason and experience.

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I have also drawn freely on my forthcoming *D'Holbach et les Encyclopédistes*.

Helvétius's works are: (1) *De l'Esprit* (1758), (2) *De l'Homme* (1773), (3) *Du Bonheur* (1773).

Holbach's ethics and politics are contained in the following anonymous or pseudonymous works (dates of English translations are added):

(1) *Christianisme dévoilé*, Boulanger (1761; New York, 1795; London, 1819).

(2) *Lettres à Eugénie* (London, 1819; New York, 1833; Boston, 1857).
(3) *Contagion sacrée*, J. Trenchard (1768).
(4) *Essai sur les préjugés*, Du Marsais (1769).
(5) *Système de la nature*, Mirabaud (1770; London, 1797, 1816, 1820–21, 1834, 1840, 1884; Philadelphia, 1808; New York, 1835; Boston, 1853).
(6) *Bon Sens*, Mirabaud (1772; New York, 1833, 1878, 1890; Chicago, 1910).
(7) *Système social* (1772–73).
(8) *Politique naturelle* (1773).
(9) *Morale universelle* (1775–76).
(10) *Ethocratie* (1776).
(11) *Eléments de morale universelle* (1790).

IX

MORELLY AND MABLY

NEITHER of the thinkers dealt with in this essay can be said to be known to the average English student of history. Sufficient measure of the interest their social philosophy has aroused on this side of the Channel is found in the fact that neither Morelly nor Mably has been given an article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Yet both contributed powerfully to the formation of revolutionary sentiment in eighteenth-century France; and both contributed something to the development of European socialism in the first half of the nineteenth century. In their own day Mably was certainly the better known, and probably the more immediately influential, even though he has since been almost entirely forgotten. It is interesting, for instance, in a volume such as the present one, to recall that an *Alphabet des sans-culottes pour former la jeunesse républicaine* contained the question: "Quels sont les grands hommes qui par leurs écrits ont préparé la Révolution?" The significant reply was: "Helvétius, Mably, Rousseau, Voltaire, Franklin." That itself may certainly be considered as some sort of justification for Mably's inclusion in this work; while Morelly's inclusion is equally justified on account of his unique contribution to the development of the communistic idea.

Almost nothing is known of the facts of Morelly's life. He was born, apparently, at Vitry-le-François, some time during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. His first work was the *Essay on the Human Mind*, published in 1743, in which he set forth his theories of the development of man's intellect and his ideas on education. Two years later there appeared his *Essay on the Human Heart*, which anticipated some of the teaching of Fourier.[1] It was not until ten more

[1] It is not certain whether there were two Morellys (father and son), or whether there was only one. Lichtenberger maintains that there were two, and that it was the

years had elapsed that he published the first important work dealing purely with social problems. The *Basiliade* was a poem which bitterly satirised existing society under cover of an allegorical story, and set forth Morelly's leading ideas. The criticisms which this work received induced Morelly to write his greatest work, *The Code of Nature*, which was published in 1755 (the same year which saw the appearance of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*). Significant of the obscurity of Morelly's life is the fact that for long his *Code* was attributed to Diderot. The German translator (1846) makes this mistake, as do Deschamps and Jannet in their book on *The Secret Societies and the Revolution* published in 1881. Yet Morelly's work has not been without influence, though it is impossible at present to estimate the exact extent of that influence. We know that Babeuf declared himself the ardent student and admirer of the *Code*; and later reformers and radicals similarly hailed Morelly as their teacher and precurser. Villegardelle, for instance, wrote of Morelly in 1841 that "he has surpassed both his predecessors—Plato, More, Campanella—and his successors—Mably, Owen, Saint-Simon—by the moving lucidity and the vigorous march of his arguments"; and *Vorwärts* published extracts from Morelly, with notes, in 1844. It is to the *Code of Nature* that we shall devote most of our attention, since it is there that the fullest and most systematic account of Morelly's teaching can be found.

II

Morelly, like Mably after him, is a violent enemy of the economic order of eighteenth-century France; and, like Mably again, the motive of his opposition is primarily ethical. The whole of his social philosophy hangs upon his conception of the original nature of man, since that conception enables him to throw the blame for social evil upon the environment rather than upon man himself. It is therefore necessary to

father who wrote the above-mentioned essays, as well as some other works (A. Lichtenberger, *Le Socialisme au XVIIIème siècle*). The latest editor of the *Code* maintains that all these works were written by the one man. For a discussion of the point see Édouard Dolléans, Introduction to the *Code de la Nature* (Paris, 1910), pp. xxiv–xxxi.

begin by examining first Morelly's teaching concerning human nature and motives.

Morelly tells us at the outset that our social thinking should not take as its point of departure man as he *is*; it is "man as he was formed by nature" who should be the beginning of all our investigation, and who should be the unit of society. Morelly's philosophy is based on a theory of the 'social man' as obviously as the classical economists based theirs on an hypothetical 'economic man,' and the portrait of this 'social man' is painted in unmistakable detail. Two of his characteristics are especially stressed throughout both *Basiliade* and *Code*—his sociability and his virtue; and it is claimed that an examination of untainted primitive society will but corroborate the truth of the portrait there given.

The sociability of man is explained by several lines of reasoning. It was feebleness and sensibility which originally brought men together, and from this union resulted reciprocal affection and the development of reason. Such a movement was cumulative in its consequences; sociability was further enhanced; industry began to develop; and useful knowledge could be amassed and transmitted. But nature further increased this growing inter-dependence in other ways: she distributed abilities unequally, and she left to man the undivided produce of the fields:

> The world is a table, sufficiently supplied for all the guests, of which the dishes belong now to *all* since all are hungry, now to a few only because the rest are satiated. Hence nobody is absolutely the master of it; nor has anybody the right to claim to be so.[1]

In this way an economic bond of union emerged to supplement the social bonds. The common patrimony, and the obligation for all to work, further integrated society. But an important consequence followed: this state of nature involved equality of rights. Men quickly learned to realise this truth, partly through the equality of their sentiments, and partly because of the equality of their needs, for it was found that nobody could forgo his rights in favour of others without

[1] *Code* (ed. 1910, by É. Dolléans), p. 13.

suffering pain himself. Morelly mentions other circumstances making for sociability. Not only was there sufficient abundance to obviate competition in the early community, but also the different desires of individuals went to different objects, and so eliminated conflict. Special talents involved varied employments; and man's very dislike of the fatigue involved in supplying his wants by his unaided efforts generated affection for those who would co-operate with him, and further strengthened his feeling for the common and tacit agreement of society. All was arranged with mechanical precision. Man's nature and the development of his motives was but part of the great machine of the universe; and "the marvellous automaton of society," says Morelly, was constructed with a view to a general and harmonious well-being, since the Supreme Wisdom "wished to make the human species an intelligent whole which might arrange itself by a mechanism as simple as it is marvellous." [1]

It is this ordination of the Supreme Wisdom which likewise explains the second of Morelly's fundamental theorems concerning the nature of man. Since man is naturally sociable, he is also naturally virtuous, and the second feature is just as important as the first for Morelly's teaching, since it supplies both the criterion of his bitter attack on existing society and contemporary ethics and the source of his optimism for the future. It is stressed throughout the *Basiliade* and the *Code*, and is reiterated in a dozen different ways. Man is "the creature of God." He never thinks of doing harm "under the empire of the natural sentiments," since all things show him the necessity for being benevolent. God has established within him innocence as principle and self-love as guide; and crime is therefore impossible to such a creature. "Beneficence is the first of all our moral ideas," and God is naturally conceived of as a sovereign beneficent Being. One interesting point of Morelly's teaching is his stressing of the *unconscious* nature of early man's activities. Man is virtuous—*i.e.*, he lives in harmony with the laws of nature, without reflection, and yields himself unhesitatingly to the spontaneous urge of his impulses. The stage of reflection, it seems, came but slowly; and the development of

[1] *Code*, p. 12.

evil further stimulated such reflection. It is suggested that the future will witness yet a third stage of the development of man's moral life, wherein fully developed reflection will enable him to practise virtue *consciously*, yet as completely as he did in that golden life of innocence of which all folklore tells.

Morelly, who believes in the myth of the 'noble savage' as much as did his contemporaries, adduces the American Indians as an illustration of his doctrine. They reveal primitive man at a moment when he is capable of receiving good laws. The families live a communal and tranquil life. Their needs are provided for by hunting; their potentialities are capable of great development. They are gentle workers, without vices. Even if they were now taught the useful arts of civilisation they would still retain their virtues, continuing to have consideration for the old folks, leaving the legislator to distribute work and employment, and allowing the wise to supervise the tribe. There is no property amongst them to inspire the desire to subjugate others. Since authority is a charge it is not disputed, and the desire for superior merit is the only ambition. In such a condition lived all men originally, with little or no property. Everywhere the tie of associated families was strong, and natural affection was the original sanction of that first authority which was paternal power—a "sweet authority which makes all goods common, and itself takes no property whatever." Through all the world, declares Morelly, "the most human nations, the gentlest, have always been those among whom there was nothing of property."

III

Sociability, virtue, and economic equality were thus the chief features of man's early life in community. But man fell from this condition of automatic harmony. Both Morelly and Mably stress this fall from equality and happiness as the most tragic fact of history; and for both of them man's history since that event is but a tale of unrelieved gloom and growing misery, during which the human faculties have become progressively more perverted. It will be seen that

the implications of this position for both writers are obviously revolutionary. If historical development is nothing but a series of retrogressive steps from an original state of perfection, the inevitable corollary is to deny the validity or sanctity of the historical structure of society, and to urge the reduction of the community to its primitive elements as speedily as may be. Of this attitude to history, which so many of the French eighteenth-century radicals expounded, Signor Nitti says appropriately:

> This was one of the hardest problems the world had yet met. The question seemed to be how to make it possible for the masses to partake in the benefits of a society where the society itself rested chiefly on aristocracy, and the traditional institutions could be safe only when resting on such a basis. In such a case it seemed natural that much of the validity of past development must be denied, in that it shut the masses from its enjoyment; one of those historical institutions vigorously attacked was property.[1]

Morelly and Mably are conspicuous examples of the truth of this general position, and both writers agree in their attack on private property as the greatest of historical errors.

The fall from nature, with all its evil consequences, therefore, constitutes the second important group of Morelly's teachings. It has been shown how deep and strong were the sentiments binding each to all in small primitive communities, and how the little government that was necessary was patriarchal. Morelly seems to think that it was the gradual growth of communities which upset this natural equilibrium. The consanguineous groups broke up, with unfortunate results. The social sentiments became steadily relaxed; and the authority of the father grew gradually weaker. A second consequence was the beginning of enforced migrations. This general movement was accompanied by the emergence of private property; and therein lay the *dénouement* of the whole tragedy, for every subsequent evil is traceable to what the *Basiliade* calls "pitiless property, mother of all the crimes which inundate the rest of the world." The root of all the evils which came later lay in the perversion of man's original nature, which followed this catastrophe. The old sentiments

[1] F. S. Nitti, *Catholic Socialism*, p. 4.

became so altered that new desires emerged, and the possibility of the conflict of classes arose. War broke out; and in the confusion that followed the break-up of the natural harmony people determined to endure man-made laws. In actual fact this desperate remedy, so far from ameliorating the human lot, only made confusion worse confounded, because the new legislators did not go back to nature for their pattern (and thus strengthen sociability). Instead, they erected their own constructions, which were not only insufficient palliatives for the healing of humanity, but themselves produced a causal chain of evils of which the greatest was the legalisation of property.

> These laws, I do not cease to repeat, and one cannot say it too often, by establishing a monstrous distribution of the products of the soil and of the very elements, by dividing what ought to remain in its entirety (or to be put back there if any accident had divided it), have aided and favoured the ruin of all sociability. Without altering, I say, the totality of immovable goods they ought to have held fast only to regulating, not property, but the usage and distribution of those goods which are not permanent. It was necessary for that only to share the employments, the mutual help of the members of a society. If there should exist some harmonic inequality between fellow-citizens, it was from an examination of the strength of each part of this whole that these proportions should have been deduced. But without touching the foundation which constitutes the basis of the machine . . . it is on the evidence of the principles I have just striven to disentangle, as from a heap of ruins, that I dare here conclude it is almost mathematically demonstrated that every division of goods—equal or unequal—every individual property in these portions, is in every society what Horace calls "summi materium mali." [1]

Two groups of consequences followed the establishment of private property: human motives became distorted and perverted; and a false ethical (and hence political) system became established. The individual and society suffered together. When property is once legalised conscious self-interest is generated. This produces discord of individual wills; and this, in its turn, means the thwarting of those natural impulses which originally worked spontaneously. Hence avarice is born.

[1] *Code*, p. 37.

> The only vice that I know in the universe is *avarice*. All the others, whatever names they may be given, are only forms and degrees of that. It is the Proteus, the Mercury, the foundation, the vehicle of all the vices. Analyse vanity, fatuity, pride, ambition, villainy, hypocrisy, viciousness; decompose in the same way the greater part of our sophistic virtues; everything resolves itself into this subtle and pernicious element, the desire to possess.[1]

Equally disastrous, however, is the false ethical system which thus results. When once man's original virtuous and social nature has become destroyed legislators and philosophers alike act on the assumption that man is essentially evil. They never ask if circumstances and environment are responsible; they take it for granted that the social unit itself is evil, and they devise accordingly a system of control and repression which, so far from alleviating misery, but exacerbates the harm already done. So long as rulers act on the assumption that it is man rather than his environment which is to blame, so long will social misery remain. On no aspect of his subject does Morelly write with greater vehemence than on this theme. The first and the third of the four main sections of the *Code* are devoted to an amplification of this contention and to deducing the results which follow from it. Constantly he contrasts 'true' and 'common' morality, and he proclaims himself the champion of the former as against the "vulgar prejudices" of the philosophers who "put at the base of all their systems this proposition—Man is born, and becomes, evil." Until this proposition is eliminated from social thinking Morelly sees no hope for mankind, for this doctrine, like the evils of property, is also cumulative in its results. Customary morality generates wrong prejudices, which are transmitted from generation to generation. Man thus becomes accustomed to an ethic which not only ignores nature, but generates the very passions it tries to suppress. In this way have legislators destroyed the bonds of sociability, opened the door to crime, stimulated the passions of cupidity, while all the time failing to see that "the spirit of property and self-interest will get the better of the most terrible punishments." Constantly does Morelly in the course of these denunciations cast his eye back to the Might-have-been. If

[1] *Code*, pp. 15–16.

there had never been private property the "natural probity" resulting from "the infinitely wise arrangement by nature" would have remained. Man would have been exempt from poverty; his only motive would have been the common good, so that sloth would never have existed. Nor would the pernicious division of society into the class enjoying lazy opulence and the class driven to crushing labour have come into being.

> No fear of lacking help, or necessary things, or useful things, would have incited immoderate desires. With all idea of property wisely removed by his forefathers, with every rivalry prevented or elimated from the usage of goods in common, would it have been possible for man to have thought of carrying off, either by force or by ruse, what had never been denied to him? [1]

Above all, the original purity of social motives would have been maintained.

> If it had been established that men should be great and estimable only in proportion as they were good, and more esteemed only in proportion that they had been better, there would never have been anything more among them than the emulation of making one another reciprocally happy.[2]

And education, instead of wasting time in combating passions which ought never to have come into being, and instead of trying to cure the sickness of an acquisitive society, could have devoted its attention to the development of reason and the investigation of the laws of nature.

We may thus summarise Morelly's fundamental ideas of social philosophy in four main theorems. Man was originally social and virtuous. It is the environment and not the nature of man which has produced evil—*i.e.*, evil arises from secondary, and not primary, causes. Consequently with the appropriate change of environment man is perfectible. But this appropriate change cannot be brought about so long as property is allowed to exist, for all changes in mere political structure are useless while economic conditions are untouched. From these doctrines Morelly moves inevitably to his doctrine of communism and his programme of reform.

[1] *Code*, p. 18. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

IV

It is obvious from what has been said that the main purpose of politics is to make anew the appropriate environment wherein man's native goodness will spontaneously manifest itself. The legislator must aim at seconding by art the good dispositions implanted by nature, at proportioning honour to both zeal and capacity, and at making man's moral goodness independent of any future hope, but dependent solely on present happiness and well-being. The first stage of reform is to allow full criticism :

> Reform the defects of politics and morality upon these laws of nature; to accomplish that, first allow full liberty to the really wise men to attack the errors and prejudices which maintain the spirit of property. Once this monster is overthrown, make education fortify this happy reform; it will no longer then be difficult for you to make your people adopt laws almost similar to those I have just collected, in accordance with what has seemed to me the best thing that reason can suggest to men in order to save them from becoming evil.[1]

The climax of reform will be achieved when property is destroyed and the prejudices associated with it are eliminated.

> Destroy property, the blind and pitiless self-interest which accompanies it, wipe out all the prejudices and the errors which support them, and there is no more offensive or defensive resistance among men, there are no more furious passions, ferocious actions, notions or ideas of moral badness.[2]

Of all the radical revolutionaries of eighteenth-century France, Morelly was in one sense the most constructive, since he alone presented a clear outline of the new social commonwealth which his philosophy demanded. The fourth book of the *Code* consists of a " Model of Legislation Conformable to the Intentions of Nature." This new constitution is divided into twelve groups of laws—viz. : (i) fundamental sacred laws which would cut the root of the vices and all the evils of society ; (ii) distributive or economic laws ; (iii) agrarian laws ; (iv) laws of public works ; (v) police and (vi) sumptuary laws ; (vii) laws of the form of government which will prevent any tyrannical domination ; (viii) laws of the administration of

[1] *Code*, p. 84. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

government; (ix) marriage laws; (x) laws of education which will prevent fathers following blind indulgence for their children; (xi) laws of study which will prevent the wanderings of the human spirit and all transcendental reverie; (xii) penal laws. Space does not allow a full treatment of all these; but the main outlines of the scheme can be indicated.

It is the first two groups which are, perhaps, the most important. There are three of these "fundamental sacred laws" which cut at the root of social evil. The first states that nothing in society shall belong *individually* to anybody, except those things of which he is going to make immediate use. The second proclaims that every citizen shall be a public man, maintained and occupied at the public expense. The third law declares that every citizen shall contribute his share to the public need according to his powers, talents, and age. By these principles will his duties be regulated, and in accordance with the distributive laws. These latter arrange for the division of the nation into equal groups of families, of tribes, of cities, and of provinces, arranged on a decimal system. Every individual will be a public servant, and the professions will be arranged on a kind of guild basis according to a general principle of local collectivism. There will be no leisured class; admission to the guilds will be allowed only after long apprenticeship; and the labour supply will be carefully equalised by society as a whole. The public shops will distribute goods according to need, for "nothing will be sold or exchanged among citizens."

Every individual will pass through a fixed schedule of duties. He will begin at ten years old to study whatever profession interests him. Between fifteen and eighteen years he must be married; at twenty he will become a landworker, and remain such for five more years, after which he will pass into one of the tithings of the industry he has chosen. Then, when he is forty, having passed through all the stages, he will become a voluntary worker; this means that, although he is still under an obligation to work, he will yet be able to select his calling. Within the towns there will be a ruling senate, comprised of all fathers over fifty years old. The other fathers will form an advisory council. Details are given for the other units of government and their interrelation, and

full provision is made for the supreme State Senate, which will have as its main function the duty of harmonising the activities and decrees of the local senates. The formula for all public injunctions will be "Reason wills, Law ordains." Compulsory and free public education is fully provided for in the *Code*, from the age of five onwards. The purpose of education is to foster the social sense of the children. All pernicious ideas about property will be carefully eradicated. Children will be taught to know and to respect the laws of the State, and the curriculum will be carefully graded according to mental development. At ten years old the child will be apprenticed in the public workshops. The number of people applying themselves to the sciences and arts will be strictly regulated by law, and only after the age of thirty will citizens be allowed to give themselves entirely to study.

These few hints may suffice to suggest something of the fascination of Morelly's completed scheme; only a detailed examination can do the scheme full justice. But although Morelly was vehement in his portrayal of the ills of existing society, and although he was so certain and clear about the kind of society he wanted to see established, yet he nowhere explains how the transition from one to the other is to be effected. He bequeathed to his age a denunciation and a dream; and he left the immediate future to look after itself.

V

When we turn to consider Gabriel Bonnot de Mably we find that not very much more is known of his life than is known about Morelly's. We have only the barest outline of facts. He was born at Grenoble on March 14, 1709, and he died at Paris seventy-six years later. He came of a legal family, allied to the Tencins, and had two brothers, Jean—with whom Rousseau stayed in 1740—and Étienne Condillac, the famous psychologist and disciple of Locke. He was educated at the Jesuit College at Lyons, where he pursued the usual course of classical studies, and was originally intended for the Church. Through the persuasions of his relative, the Cardinal de Tencin, he entered the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, but he refused to advance beyond the grade of sub-deacon.

He was admitted into the circle of Mme de Tencin, at whose famous Parisian *salon* there gathered the *élite* of *littérateurs*, and even in this distinguished circle he soon attracted attention by his views on contemporary political events. In 1740 appeared his first work, *Parallels between the Romans and the French in Relation to Government*. This work had a fair success at the time, in spite of the ill-arrangement of its material, which Mably himself acknowledges in the *Advertisement*—" no order, no connexion between ideas, objects presented in a false light." Later on Mably became so ashamed of the success of his work that when he discovered a copy of it at the Count of Egremont's house he tore it to pieces. Before another decade had passed he had rejected most of the important ideas contained in this work, such as the acceptance of despotism and the necessity for the division of society into rich and poor, and was zealously advocating the exactly contrary doctrines.

In 1741 Cardinal de Tencin entered the Ministry, and on the recommendation of the Cardinal's sister Mably was appointed his private secretary. This contact with official life was destined to have great influence on Mably's later development. Its first result was the composition, for the new Minister's instruction, of an abridgement of all the peace treaties since Westphalia. Mably also used to prepare the necessary memoranda and reports for de Tencin. It is said that in 1743 it was he who drew up the terms of the treaty which Voltaire took to Frederick II; three years later he prepared the negotiations for the Congress of Breda. But the Cardinal and his secretary quarrelled in 1748, on account of a Protestant marriage which the former wished to annul. Henceforth Mably lived in strict retirement for the rest of his life; he refused to be under an obligation to anybody, and withdrew completely from men and from practical affairs. He consecrated himself entirely to his love of Greek and Roman antiquity, to his philosophy and to his writings; and attempted first, by reading and reflection, to find the path to happiness and virtue for mankind, and then to point out that path, by voluminous writings, to an evil and unhappy world. His retirement accentuated in him, apparently, his native reserve, austerity, and pessimism, features which run through all his works and his life to the end. Perhaps it would be unfair to

call him a misanthrope, for his mind was never entirely dominated by his pessimism; yet it always remained the battleground wherein was waged a bitter conflict between his remarkable intellectual love of humanity and his poignant sense of social realities—of widespread misery and moral degradation. These elements in his mind were never fully integrated; now one, now the other, was in the ascendant; consequently his work could never become a *system*; and the cleavage in his mind produced a cleavage in his teaching, wherein was expounded a social ideal which he believed incapable of achievement, and a practical programme whose efficacy he doubted. He was morally and intellectually incapable of refusing to face reality; nor could he convince himself of any automatic world-process towards perfection; nevertheless, he was tortured by the beauty of a dream which "pursued him down the labyrinthine ways" of all his thinking and writing. His pessimism was the product of this inner disharmony.

To his contemporaries he was known as the "prophet of evil," and in this respect analogies (as well as contrasts) might be drawn between his position and that of, say, Carlyle. "It is true," he is reported to have said, "that I know men well enough not to hope easily for any good from them." Yet he himself remained throughout disinterested and unselfish, living up to the doctrines he preached to others. He gave his works to the booksellers and took no profits. He lived without luxury and without pomp, never with more than one servant, and economising his expenditure the better to be able to give charity where it was needed. He paid court to nobody, and both his temperament and his way of life made him inimical to all courtiers. Several stories are told of him in this connexion. On one occasion his friends urged him to see a Minister. "I will see him gladly," replied Mably, "when he is no longer in office." His independence could be carried to an almost morbid extreme. Marshal Richelieu urged him to apply for membership of the Académie Française, and promised support for his candidature. Mably at first consented, being apparently touched by the kindness of the suggestion. Hardly, however, had he accepted the suggestion than he besought his brother Condillac to free him from his promise, "because if I accepted I should be obliged to praise Cardinal

Richelieu—which is against my principles; and if I did not praise him, since I owe my election to his great-nephew, I should be guilty of ingratitude." Later on, when it was suggested that he should undertake the education of one of the princes, he made his well-known reply: "I should teach him that kings are made for the people and not the people for kings." These, it may be noted, are the exact words of Fénelon's *Télémaque*.

After his quarrel with the Cardinal, then, Mably lived entirely in his writings to the end of his days. Between 1748 and 1785 he wrote fourteen works of importance, which contributed in no small degree to the making of the revolutionary mind in France, though the exact degree of that influence will always remain a subject for speculation. In 1748 he published his *Public Law of Europe*. This was based on the collation of European treaties which he had prepared for Cardinal de Tencin, and had a universal success. Desessarts says:

> It was written for statesmen, and even for ordinary citizens. It was admitted into all the studies of Europe; it was publicly taught in the English universities and translated into all languages; it placed its author in the front rank of the greatest publicists of Europe.

Mably was not allowed to publish it in France, so it had to be published abroad. Even so, the intervention of d'Argenson was necessary to prevent the seizure of copies introduced into France. The following year there appeared *Observations on the Greeks*, again printed abroad; an English edition appeared in 1776. The *Observations on the Romans* was produced at Geneva in 1751, and an English edition appeared in the same year. Many of the ideas had already been put forward in the *Parallels between the Romans and the French*, eleven years before, but, says Mably, "instead of correcting my incorrigible *Parallels* I made it into two separate and absolutely new works." In 1757 there was published at The Hague *Of the Principles of Negotiation*, which was intended to be an introduction to the public law of Europe, and to provide "the knowledge and exposition of the true principles on which nations should conduct themselves, one to another, to maintain concord between them." It severely attacks the treaties of the previous hundred years and the European foreign policies

generally; and it pleads, in the name of utility and of humanitarianism, for more honest conduct. The following year Mably wrote a really remarkable work, *Rights and Duties of Citizens*, which was not published until the very eve of the Revolution, after his death. It is remarkable because it is both a prophecy and a programme. It foretells both a revolution and the course which the revolutionaries ought to pursue if their work is to remain permanent; and it utters a grave warning against the use of this revolutionary assembly by unscrupulous leaders for their own ends. Something will be said later of the actual programme which is advocated in this book.

In 1763 there was published at Amsterdam one of the most important of all Mably's writings, *The Conversations of Phocion on the Relations between Morals and Politics*. It purported to be a dialogue, discovered at the monastery of Monte Cassin, translated from the Greek of Nicocles. The work was an immense success, and was hailed as one of the best books of the age; certainly, as has been well remarked, it is the only one of Mably's writings which has any charm. The "Society of Berne" awarded it a prize of six hundred francs as being of the greatest value for mankind, though Rousseau claimed in his *Confessions* that it was "a barefaced and shameless compilation" from his own works. *Observations on the History of France* appeared in 1765 at Geneva, and three years later the *Doubts proposed to the Philosophical Economists on the Natural and Essential Order of Political Societies*. The latter work was directed mainly against Mercier de la Rivière and the Physiocratic doctrine of 'legal despotism'; it attacks both despotism and *laissez-faire*, and expounds the benefits of communism. It was after the publication of this work that Mably was asked (as well as Rousseau) by the Poles to assist them in creating a stable constitution. Mably was a sufficiently conscientious follower of Montesquieu to want to go to Poland first in order to learn the peculiar needs and circumstances of the country. Accordingly he spent a year abroad before drawing up his scheme in 1771, though it was not published until ten years later. Contrary to what one might have supposed, and contrary to Rousseau, he pronounced in favour of hereditary monarchy, providing that only the "shadow of authority" should be left to the king. In 1776 there appeared at

Amsterdam another dialogue, *Of Legislation; or, the Principles of Laws*, which elaborates the teaching in *Phocion*, fully expounds Mably's message, and pleads for equality of fortunes and conditions among citizens by the control of finances and the banishment of luxury and the fine arts. An essay *On the Idea of History* appeared in 1778, and another on *The Manner of Writing History* in 1783; the latter, containing severe strictures on Hume, Robertson, Gibbon, and Voltaire, was translated into English the same year. Next year there appeared *Principles of Morals*, which evoked the fierce hostility of the Church and the censure of the Sorbonne, and finally the *Observations on the Government and Laws of the United States*, which was immediately translated into English. Mably died the following year, but it was not until ten years had elapsed that a complete edition of his writings was published which included the various posthumous works. All his works contain, either overtly or by implication, a political message; but Mably was by no means a system-maker. Consequently one has to hunt through the whole of his writings in order to see his teaching in its entirety. That teaching was not always consistent, and was occasionally very nebulous. Nevertheless, although some of the details may vary or be contradictory, the general attitude remains remarkably consistent from the time of Mably's quarrel with his patron until his death.

Although Mably's whole life was a protest against the social and political conditions of his age, yet he is himself a typical product of the intellectual life of that age. Speaking broadly, we may say that the eighteenth-century thinkers on both sides of the Channel expressed two distinct lines of thought. There was the humanistic movement, emphasising human worth and the dignity of man's life on the earth; and there was the scientific movement, whose disciples acted on the assumptions that universal law was immanent in all things, and that consequently all things were interconnected by an "harmonious causal order." These assumptions led to the belief in the possibility of a social physics discoverable by deductive methods. Analyse the nature of man fully, discover the universal 'natural' laws regulating his action, and you will then be able to deduce an entire social science for the regulation of communal conduct.

Psychology, politics, and ethics are but three aspects of the same study—viz., the study of 'nature,' or the world-machine. All these tendencies can be seen in Mably even more clearly than in Morelly. He believes that true politics must be based on a true ethic; but a true ethic can be found only by an investigation of the nature of man. When this is discovered it will be possible to determine what the social ideal ought to be, what measures ought to be undertaken to reach it, and what laws ought to be enforced. The lawgivers will be those who have sufficient insight to perceive the "laws of nature"; and civil laws, which will ever tend to approach the ideal and immutable laws, will only need to be few and simple. All Mably's reasoning is of this *a priori*, deductive type; even so, it is not always systematic, and is sometimes vague; and even when he turns to history to aid his reasoning he approaches it with the same preconceptions and the firm belief that history, being one chain of cause and effect, should "teach lessons" of the workings of the laws of nature. It may be thought from this that Mably would accept the doctrine of the speedy perfectibility of man, but this is not so, and that for an important reason. He had accepted the 'sensational' psychology of Locke and his own brother's extreme modifications of that. He had learnt that human character is built up by the play of the environment upon the individual mind, aided by comparisons and judgments which had become habitual. Such a character is, therefore, firmly established and deeply seated; it cannot be easily changed. This is one of the sources of Mably's pessimism, for he doubts at times if change is possible, and cannot see a way out of the cumulative effect of evil and the vicious circle it established. Environment and habit create evil men, who in their turn make the environment worse. Yet they are the only instruments for the modification of the environment. How is one to meet the difficulty? This is one of the problems with which Mably is always wrestling, and which drives him at times almost to despair. He sometimes thinks that "men are too depraved for them to have a wise polity"; certainly it makes him despair of the political ability of the lower classes, whose souls are "vilified." Nevertheless, it is this very pessimism, and this very

element of empiricism in his otherwise entirely deductive reasoning, which bars his way to a facile belief in progress and makes such a big gap—which all writers have noticed and commented upon—between his ideal of communism and the practical measures he recommends. His theories of the nature of man involved him in the belief that man must be re-educated, and that the process must be a very slow one; and this will account, therefore, for his distrust of pure democracy so far as practical politics are concerned. Curiously enough, Morelly appears to display none of this distrust, nor to feel anything of Mably's growing doubt.

It is thus evident that an examination of Mably's teaching must involve three main considerations. We must first inquire into his views on the nature of man and ask how evil arose, as we did with Morelly. Then it is necessary to inquire as to the purpose and possibilities of politics, and the goal to be aimed at. Finally we must discover the programme to be pursued by the wise legislator.

VI

The fundamental drive in man is his self-interest. Before all things he seeks his own well-being, and that fact must be the basis of all ethics and politics. Nature says to him: "You are made to work for your happiness; you ought to prefer it to everything; there is your rule, there is your compass." But man is so constituted that he cannot make himself happy in the solitary state. It seems that once man did live in this solitary state, though Mably is uncertain on the subject. If he did, he soon found it an inconvenient and miserable one, for man is so made that he cannot achieve happiness by himself. An examination of his nature reveals bonds of each with all, and shows that Nature herself has created him a social being. Even though he pursues pleasure and eschews pain, he can attain his end only collectively.

> The simple needs of nature draw us closer one to another. Nature has spread enough goods on the earth to make us all equally happy if,

sharing them with some equality, we had the wisdom not to abuse them.[1]

Mutual help is necessary because of this connexion which is thus imposed upon us.

> That is the perpetual treaty of alliance which Nature has made necessary because she wants to unite us in society. All men ought to observe it religiously, since it binds, unites, and blends the *general* well-being of society and the *particular* well-being of each citizen.[2]

Other factors were involved in the development of man's social activities; division of labour arose from diversity of capabilities and still further unified mankind; and man slowly came to realise that virtue was possible only in society, and virtue always means happiness, since (by definition) it involves living in conformity with the dictates of Nature. Thus does Mably attempt to bridge the gap between egoism and altruism; he does it by denying that they are necessarily antithetical, and by assuming that a pre-established harmony of egoism has been created by Nature herself. He does not accept the contract idea; he believes that sociality *emerged* slowly and that man only gradually became aware of the factors involved. But Nature does more than merely making man social and imposing collective existence upon him. She *wills equality* among men. That Nature intends all men to enjoy equality is one of Mably's chief contentions; it is the burden of all his teaching and the driving force of all his arguments and pleadings. Nature proclaims in a hundred various ways: "You are all my children and I love you all equally. The whole earth is the patrimony of each of you." Because all men have the same needs, and because they have all been equally offered the fruits of the earth, then the establishment and maintenance of equality must be the aim of all politics and the criterion of all laws. So that it is the fault of politics if society is in a miserable condition to-day. Equality is even more important than liberty, for it is the cardinal gift of Nature herself. To Mably it is both an historic fact and a judgment of value, though he is far more

[1] *Collection complète des œuvres de l'Abbé de Mably* (Paris; an III), vol. x, p. 306.
[2] *Op. cit.*, vol. x, p. 325

concerned with the second of these two aspects than with the first.

> Since Nature has placed no difference between her children; since she gives to me as to you the same rights to her favours; since we have all the same reason, the same senses, the same organs; since she has not created any masters, subjects, slaves, princes, nobles, traders, rich, poor—how can political laws, which ought to be only the development of natural laws, establish a crushing and cruel difference among men? All legislation is partial, and consequently unjust, which sacrifices one part of the citizens to the other.[1]

Even though men are sociable, however, and are created equal, they have within them the possibility of perversion, since they are driven by their passions. These are inherent in the nature of man and cannot be excised, but they need the most guarded treatment. Some are capable of leading man to great virtue and happiness, but others are extremely dangerous. When directed to the wrong objects they would be capable of perverting man's whole personality. In the state of nature they caused little trouble, for as man came from the hands of Nature he was moderate and could give himself up to the sway of these instincts without fear of harming himself or others. For Mably, the story of man's development is the story of the destruction of this spontaneous and unconscious harmony within his soul, of the perversion of his original nature by the evocation of his evil potentialities, and of the direction of these perverted tendencies to false ends. Originally, however, they were quiescent. In that Golden Age before property came into being, even though classes seem to have existed, man was happy. The robust cultivated the land, and the remainder exercised the necessary arts. Public shops existed to receive produce, which was equitably distributed according to needs, and magistrates supervised morals. (Mably is never very clear, or even consistent, concerning details; he nowhere explains why the magistrates should have been necessary.)

Such was the original state of perfection; but Mably teaches, like Morelly, that man fell from his high estate and that his fall was due to the emergence of property. Again we are given no details, in spite of the fact that the creation

[1] *Of the Study of History*, vol. iii, p. 3.

of property was the most disastrous event in the history of mankind. We are left rather to conjecture. It seems that property (and with it "the infinite evils which have come from this baneful box of Pandora") came into being as a result of several causes. Magistrates seem to have given themselves a preponderating place in society and to have abused their trust. They allotted the produce unfairly, so that the people agreed to divide the land among themselves. Elsewhere we are told that property was "conceived by a drone"; the lazy allowed themselves to live on the work of others, so that their self-interest gradually triumphed over their social sense. No adequate precautions were taken against these dangers because the dangers were not fully realised, and because the process appears to have been a very slow one. But whatever its cause, this fall from primitive communism was fatal to man's happiness; its terrible effects have grown from that day to this and have plunged man into his present terrible plight.

The root of all the evils following the establishment of private property is an ethical one. The development of this fact is one of Mably's chief interests. The motive running through the whole of his work is an ethical motive, and all his lines of thought radiate from this central ideal of the moral disaster which was involved when primitive communism gave way to private property. To it he is always turning; from it he can never escape; and even his interest in history is an ethical interest—a story to point his morals. Put briefly, the consequence of creating property was the destruction of that precarious inner harmony which man experienced in his Golden Age. That inner harmony was virtue, for it involved living according to the laws of nature and balancing the passions in a golden mean. Now, however, the passions became disintegrated and unco-ordinated; "fecund vices" appeared and rapidly grew, and happiness was permanently destroyed. This is all because the instincts have become directed to a wrong *end*—because they are now centred upon property instead of upon social well-being. "The passion of enriching oneself has therefore taken a growing place in the human heart, and has stifled all justice." It is this passion of avarice and of cupidity which is the most

disastrous of all the "fecund vices," the more so since, once it is aroused, it has the unfortunate capacity for subsuming the other passions to itself. All passions need money for their gratification; hence they are "always disposed to march under the banner of avarice." So that once the accumulation of riches has been permitted the innate egoism of man rapidly leads him into a scramble for more wealth. That self-love with which Mably starts his argument, and which is capable of so much good, becomes perverted, applies itself to acquisition, and soon becomes transformed into avarice. In proportion as man gets away from primitive equality, so does this passion increase. The consequence is the perversion of man's whole personality; it "opens the soul to ambition"; it generates "useless needs and superfluous desires."

> The more I reflect on it, the more I am convinced that inequality of fortunes and of conditions decomposes man, so to speak, and alters the natural sentiments of his heart.[1]

Once this sickness has seized upon society a multitude of foul symptoms emerges. (Mably himself uses the metaphor of the poisoned blood stream and the "festering sores" it produces.) Sloth is developed in the rich, humiliation in the poor, and envy, covetousness, and ambition among all. The once homogeneous community is now split into two—the *haves* and the *have-nots*; and for the *have-nots* "there is no longer fatherland, parent, or friend."

> Riches produce *need*, which is the most lax of the vices, or *luxury*, which gives to riches all the vices of property and to the poor a covetousness which they cannot satisfy except by crime or the vilest dastardliness. Voluptuousness comes in the wake of luxury, and while they soften and enervate the soul of the rich (thenceforward incapable of general effort) they throw the people into a misery which makes them ferocious or stupid.[2]

The rich seize power. If the poor resist, civil wars result; if they submit, aristocracy soon appears, and that is rapidly followed by oligarchy and then despotism.

> Equality must produce all the benefits because it unites men, elevates their soul, and prepares them for mutual sentiments of well-

[1] *Legislation*, (1776), vol. i, p. 49. [2] *Œuvres*, vol. xiv, p. 342.

being and friendship. I conclude, therefore, that inequality produces all the evils, because it degrades men, humiliates them, and sows among them division and hate.[1]

Thus does society degenerate into a field of battle in which a few rich triumph over the suffering and wretched masses.

Property divided us into two classes—rich and poor. The first will always prefer their own domestic fortune to that of the State; and the second will never love a government and laws which permit them to be unhappy.[2]

The development of luxury is not the least of the evils resulting from a state of affairs in which the masses support an idle minority; and against luxury Mably directs some of his bitterest denunciations. He constantly recurs to it, attacking it on many grounds, though the ultimate complaint is always the same—the fact that luxury still further corrupts the original nature of man and aggravates the social confusion already existing. It is Mably's hatred of luxury which leads him to attack commerce with similar bitterness and to urge the necessity for its strict curtailment, if not its abolition.

There was a time when every people, satisfied with the goods which its land gave to it, had (so to speak) no other needs than those of nature. Commerce has made this happy simplicity of manners disappear.[3]

And it has developed to such a degree since the sixteenth century that it now amounts to a colossal evil. Nowhere does Mably's personal austerity—his social puritanism, one might almost call it—show so plainly as on this topic. Even the benefits which luxury is supposed to bring are reckoned as of no account when weighed against the evil morals that result; and even those supposed benefits rest on a great delusion, for luxury never produces happiness.

Man wants to increase his happiness by multiplying the needs of indulgence and vanity. How mad we are not to see that the more hands work at the making of our pleasures and comforts the less happy we shall be![4]

It increasingly perverts the individual, and always tends to

[1] *Législation* (1776), vol. i, p. 50.
[2] *Op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 100.
[3] *Œuvres*, vol. vi, p. 472.
[4] *Op. cit.*, vol. iii, p. 100.

foster revolution. Consequently Mably is averse from all trade, that "kind of monster which destroys itself with its own hands"; the more so since the evil results it produces have themselves made reform almost impossible. "Avarice has given to Europe prejudices which it is too difficult to destroy."

The present situation is therefore direful in the extreme. Riches are in the hands of a few; the rest subsist only by working on behalf of a minority, and are consequently no better off than the slaves of antiquity. Mably's sympathy for these downtrodden masses is vivid and intense. The 'liberty' which, it is pretended, they enjoy is "nothing else than the power to break their chains by giving themselves to a new master." Need makes slaves of them, and "they are the more unhappy since no law provides for their subsistence." Consequently

> it is mocking reason to pretend that all men are free in a country where a citizen employs another citizen to serve him, and condemns him to employments which are the vilest and hardest for humanity.[1]

Contradictory interests arise; but even this is not the worst. Mably, with his moral passion for saving souls, sees the ultimate consequence in the degradation of man himself.

> The multitude, degraded by employments and needs which condemn it to ignorance and to vile and base thoughts, has neither the means nor the time to raise itself by reflection to the principle of wise politics.[2]

Elsewhere he says that since "the artisans subsist only by the wage they receive from the rich" who employ them "the work must necessarily vilify their souls." Consequently he finds himself once again involved in a vicious circle.

Thus has man fallen from his pristine equality and happiness into inequality and degradation; and in the process created numerous aggravating circumstances which will be almost as difficult to eradicate as the source of the evil itself. Equality and inequality—with all their implications—in a social and economic sense are Mably's chief themes. His

[1] *Œuvres*, vol. vi, p. 481. [2] *Ibid.*, vol. viii, p. 229.

interest in *political* equality is subordinate to these. What, then, is the purpose of politics, and what its ideal?

VII

Politics should be subordinate to ethics, and all political programmes should have an ethical intention. Politics should guard against everything in man which leads to egoism, and should stimulate those good dispositions which man naturally has for his fellows once he discerns their necessity for his own well-being. Municipal laws will make men happy in proportion as they approach to the laws of nature; to the degree, that is to say, in which they stimulate social tendencies, on the one hand, and direct and restrain the passions on the other, for all evils arise from blind and inconstant passions.

> Is it not certain that politics ought to make us love virtue, and that such is the only object that legislation, the laws, and the magistrates ought to propose to themselves?

Mably follows Plato closely when treating of the virtues. There are three main virtues which a true ethic should cultivate, and these are to be grafted on to four "mother virtues." Prudence is the basis of all virtue, since, being "enlightened reason," it holds all the passions in check; justice and courage follow. The four auxiliary virtues are temperance, love of work, love of glory—*i.e.*, social approbation—and of God. The last virtue is especially important, for God sees the heart, whereas the magistrate can see only the action; therefore religion should be encouraged by the State in the interest of social harmony, since it means the addition of a spiritual sanction to supplement the magistracy. The State must accordingly always strengthen the anticipation of rewards and punishments hereafter in order to achieve its end of securing right conduct. It thus appears that Mably's politics, in spite of their insistence on the conditions of the lower classes, have not *primarily* an economic basis. The interest throughout is essentially an ethical one, and the political process must accordingly be a process of moral re-education.

The purpose of that re-education is to lead man back again

to social equality, and this means that the ultimate political ideal is the primitive communism from which man started, for

> if the least ray of hope should strike our reason, ought we not to aspire to this happy community of goods, so much praised, so much regretted by poets, which Lycurgus established at Sparta, which Plato wanted to see revived in his republic, and which, thanks to the depravity of morals, can be only a chimera in the world? [1]

The Indians of Paraguay have no property; there, as in Sparta,

> the State, owner of everything, distributes to individuals the things they need. That is, I confess, a political economy which still pleases me as much as if I had never read what our philosophers had written on landed property.

It is untrue that property alone inspires work. (On this point Mably strongly attacks the Physiocrats.) The judicious establishment of social distinctions can become as effective an impetus to work as avarice itself, "and would make clear to each individual the patrimony common to the whole society." The question as to which system, property or communism, produces greater wealth is more or less irrelevant, for Mably insists as strongly as Ruskin that 'well-being,' both individual and social, consists not in the abundance of goods that man possesses (as the Physiocrats say), but rather consists in virtue. If this is admitted, then the argument for communism is admitted too. "Establish community of goods, and nothing is thence easier than to establish equality of conditions, and to affirm on this double foundation the well-being of man." He even attacks the idea of the individual "right to the whole produce of labour," for instead of the order of nature he fears that this "gives us only the natural order of avarice, of cupidity, and of foolishness." Nor is it necessary that magistrates should be given a share of the produce; social esteem alone should be their reward. The moment this no longer satisfies them we know that personal cupidity is already acting under the guise of needs of State. *Laissez-faire* too is obviously pernicious, for inequality results at once, and how then will you convince those who have nothing ("that is to

[1] *Œuvres*, vol. xii, p. 380.

say, the greater part of the citizens") that they are "evidently in the order where they can find the greatest sum of pleasure and well-being"? There are obvious philosophical difficulties to be found when we compare Mably's attitude to the "laws of nature" with his attitude to *laissez-faire*; but nowhere does he attempt to meet them. The supreme blessing of communism lies in the fact that the individual good is reconciled with the social good; "only this single arrangement" can prevent individual interests triumphing over general interests.

But is communism possible? It would be if our prejudices were not as ingrained as they are; but we have become perverted through centuries of wrong habit. Consequently Mably seriously doubts if we can return to our primitive condition. He expounds communism, he says, "not in order to tell us that it is necessary to renounce our property and re-enter the paths of nature," but to indicate, rather, the nature of our evil. "No human force to-day would be able to attempt the re-establishment of equality without causing greater disorders than those one would wish to avoid." Hence communism is only a criterion, not a programme; and when Mably comes to sketch the outlines of the revolutionary agenda he writes accordingly.

The lineaments of the good legislator and the spirit of his reforms thus stand revealed. Before everything else he will be a moralist, deflecting, sublimating, and eliminating the passions and recalling to man his original nature and destiny. To do this successfully he will act *gradually*, and not cataclysmically. He will use circumspection and discretion, playing off one passion against another, but especially opposing avarice. He will realise the length of the road to be travelled, and will therefore develop the easiest virtues first among the people. There are three groups of countries which will be his models, in different degrees. The city-states of antiquity are undoubtedly the best models to be copied, and in them Mably finds achieved his dearest ideals. It is Sparta, particularly, which captures his enthusiasm, and Lycurgus who is the pattern for the hero as statesman. It was Lycurgus who "descended, so to speak, right into the depth of the heart of his citizens," and who "best knew the views of nature." The

glory of Sparta and of Lycurgus lay in the fact that property was taken from the individual and given to the State, and that luxury and inequality were banished from the community. But alas! the Lycurguses are few; "since the birth of things there have, perhaps, not been four Lycurguses in the world." Plato also arouses Mably's enthusiasm, and much of Mably's writing shows how deeply he was under Plato's influence. It was Plato who "had calculated the force of human reason and that of our passions," and who "knew the generation of our vices and the fatal chain which binds them one to another."

> Perhaps he would have had the audacity to tell you that these savages who wander on your frontiers are less distant from the principles of a good civilisation than the people who cultivate commerce and cherish riches.[1]

Even Plato, though, made one serious mistake, for he tolerated property among the artisans. But, as we have remarked, Mably seriously doubts the practicability of reverting to such happy conditions as the Greek city-states. The other models he extols are more nearly capable of being copied; the simple European countries, such as Switzerland and Sweden, are extolled on the one hand (he especially admires Swedish sumptuary laws and the enactments favouring the poor), and on the other, in various ways, the American republics. The latter, however, are running grave risks; their restoration of the sovereignty of the people may be admirable, but they have been precipitate in establishing full democracy in some states; and there is a grave moral danger jeopardising their future, inasmuch as, since the original motive of their revolt was avarice, avarice is still unsubdued, and may eventually lead them into a condition as evil as those in the Old World. It is only in antiquity that one finds the true political model; and Mably's pessimism is largely the product of his apotheosis of the past.

But even when wise legislators have been found, is reform possible? Mably often doubts it; men are too depraved. France, in particular, seems beyond recovery, and may go from bad to worse. Unless some unforeseen event arises France will "fall into a state of decay and languor into which

[1] *Œuvres*, vol. viii, p. 440.

at last every society falls which prevents citizens concerning themselves with public affairs." Yet he is not always without hope, even though civil war may be necessary to achieve reform. Every citizen has a right to act for himself when suitable circumstances arise, in order to ensure that his situation be improved in accordance with the laws of nature and that the laws be modified. Thus civil war may be a blessing, for to regard civil war as wrong " is a doctrine most contrary to good morals and public well-being." It is not necessary to wait until the last limits of tyranny are reached before deciding to act. " Choose between revolution and slavery," he says in one of his bitter cries; " there is no middle way! " Yet although his heart counsels violence, his head urges moderation. He frequently praises " this art of making good slowly and by degrees, of not leaping too brusquely the intervals which we are condemned to pass through with patience." Both the practical reforms which Mably draws up—the one for Poland and that for France herself—are full of a sane moderation. His belief that the masses were " mostly fools " always damped down his practical ardour, so that he could tell the Poles that, in the reform of a bad government, to secure the greatest good possible it is necessary " not to aspire to too high a perfection." One must struggle continuously against abuses, tolerating some while others are being eliminated and new social habits are being established. True it is that Lycurgus succeeded suddenly, but his was a small state, and there was only one Lycurgus! Nor must confiscation be resorted to, because the poor have not the necessary virtue to maintain an artificially established equality. Only the savages have such virtue.

> What happy disposition for the establishment of communism! It is on the banks of the Ohio or the Mississippi that Plato would have been able to establish his republic.

As to the form of government to be established Mably is quite clear; it must be the mixed form. He analyses the three pure forms and finds them all wanting. Despotism, even enlightened despotism, arouses his fury, because of the obvious abuses to which it is liable; and his volume of *Doubts* propounded to the Physiocrats is devoted entirely to developing

the theme. Aristocracy is no less dangerous, since it passes quickly through oligarchy to tyranny. Democracy is theoretically ideal, and should be the basis of all true government. But the masses are ignorant, 'vilified,' and intemperate, and once in power would show themselves capricious despots. For this reason, too, even with a limited franchise, he is hostile to direct government; the legislature must be selected by intermediate electoral colleges for the localities. Therefore Mably eventually declares in favour of what he calls *republican monarchy* —a phrase which he appears to have been the first to coin, and which was popular in the early days of the Revolution. A mixed government is to be established, with clear separation of powers, and with the strictest subordination of the executive to the legislature. It is because England has not achieved this latter position—because, that is to say, the English king still has extensive powers—that Mably disapproves of Montesquieu's admiration for the English Constitution. England is only half free so long as the king retains any independent powers whatsoever.

VIII

With these principles as his guide Mably draws up a comprehensive scheme of reform for France. All effort should be concentrated on the calling of the States General. That is to be the beginning of the Revolution. When the States have met their first act must be to establish their own legislative independence by passing a "fundamental law," setting forth the times and circumstances of all future meetings, for only such a written constitution can be adequate safeguard against tyranny. The executive will be subordinated to the legislature; many of its functions as at present exercised—*e.g.*, finance—will be taken over by the Legislative Assembly, and the remaining functions will be performed by separate executive committees for the particular departments—*e.g.*, police, justice, foreign affairs, etc. It is remarkable to think that Mably's plans, although not published until the eve of the Revolution, should have been drawn up in 1758, and should have so closely anticipated the actual course of events thirty years later.

The specific reforms Mably advocates are scattered throughout his writings, and are mainly obvious corollaries from his fundamental principles. First is finance. Mably wants the State to have "the fewest needs possible." The example of moderation is to come from above; hence State finances must be diminished. "I could wish that there were no public finances," for "according as the government is more or less avaricious the citizens will more or less estimate wealth." Accordingly the State must do everything to create a moral atmosphere wherein wealth is held in due disregard. The magistrates, for instance, should not be remunerated for working for the public good. If they will not do many things for little money it proves that they are the type who will soon do little work for much money. Imposts are to be gathered in as simple a way as possible, without the assistance of intermediaries. All taxes should be direct taxes on land, and the surplus is to be spent on public works.

Secondly, there will be various regulations aimed at securing greatest equality among citizens. Chief of these would be a code for controlling inheritance. The liberty of willing would largely be curtailed, and the degrees of relationship within which even limited inheritance might be allowed would be drastically cut down. Along with these regulations there would have to be agrarian laws strictly controlling the extent of landed property, for without them the vice of inequality will never be eliminated; they alone maintain equilibrium and justice; they alone can "give the poor a fatherland"; and incidentally they will foster production, since small inheritances are best cultivated. Society is to be divided into social orders, and each order is to have a fixed patrimony established within it. Appropriation may be necessary to secure and maintain this reform.

Lastly, various social laws will be enforced to maintain the happy equality thus secured. "Sumptuary laws will be infinite"; and State-appointed censors will enforce them as well as control public education. "I should not end speaking of sumptuary laws to you if I wanted to make known all their advantages." Luxury will be destroyed in diverse ways; the "useless arts," such as painting and sculpture, will be proscribed. Commerce, rightly disdained

by antiquity, will be controlled and limited to necessities. The amassing of riches abroad will be provided against; and there will be rigid control of the sale of corn, to prevent the growth of monopolies. State granaries for times of dearth must be established.

With the enactment of a fundamental law of the constitution, followed by the establishment of these social regulations, society will retrace some of the steps it has taken away from the blissful state of nature. Thus will the humble be educated up to a new sense of dignity, and be removed from the misery that brutalises them at present. It will not be difficult to establish peasant proprietorship and to ensure that "there are no circumstances in which a working father would be condemned to die of hunger with his family."

Such are the main doctrines of these two notable thinkers. It is apparent that they had much in common. For each of them, social theory is largely a by-product of the general metaphysical view of the world which they hold in common. Both believed in the perfection of the primitive, and in the environmental theory of evil; and both regarded history in the same way—as a retrogressive movement, the effects of which were disastrous, and must be undone. They agree in the bitterness of their attacks on the existing order of society, and in each case their protest is an ethical revolt with economic implications. They are at one in their attack on property as the central evil of society, and they both accept communism as an ideal. Moreover, they are alike in their methods; for their reasoning is throughout abstract, essentially unhistorical and deductive, being based on a mechanical view of the universe and the figment of a "social man." Yet their differences are no less marked. Morelly is more of an optimist; Mably more of a pessimist. Morelly really seems to believe in the perfectibility of man; Mably, as has been shown, is far more hesitant. He seems to have more of the "sense of institutions" than has Morelly; perhaps it was his practical experience that gave him this. Certainly he is far more careful than is Morelly to trace out the precise steps by which his ideal may be approached, and in doing so he not only keeps closer to

existing facts, but shows that remarkable anticipation of actual events which we have already noted.

Yet both have been forgotten. Various suggestions may be offered for this strange fact. Political writing, it would seem, can be roughly divided into two main classes, which we may call the literature of permanence, and the literature of adjustment. The one is concerned primarily with the ultimate social values; the other has as its aim to adjust existing social conditions and existing social thinking to the prevailing world-view. Of course, these rough divisions are not mutually exclusive, but few are the writers who combine greatness in both. Yet the consequence of such an hypothesis is important, since it involves, to a large extent, the subsequent fate of each kind of writing. While the one type is capable of perennial influence, the other diminishes in influence with the passing of the years. What has been called the literature of adjustment is bound eventually—if it is of sufficient volume and sufficiently in harmony with its age—to end in experiment. Hence its aim is essentially practical, and even if it starts as a theory it ends in a programme. Its vitality is therefore ephemeral, since, after the programme has been put to the pragmatic test, it must yield to the necessity of yet a new adjustment, and itself become but of archæological interest. The only circumstance which may redeem it from this fate is literary merit. Such an hypothesis would account to a large extent for the fate which has overtaken both Morelly and Mably. Both wrote for a particular age; both had a practical and formative intention; and the circumstances for which they wrote were altered in the Revolutionary cataclysm. Moreover, both accepted and based their teaching upon a metaphysic which has passed away as completely as has their social environment. Present-day conceptions are evolutionary and dynamic, not static; they are biological, not mechanical. Consequently those doctrines which are dependent upon a general philosophy which has become obsolete themselves have lost not only intellectual validity, but also emotional significance; and the one loss is as important as the other in determining the waning of influence. And neither writer had sufficient distinctive literary merit to save him from oblivion. The

ultimate influence is not infrequently in inverse ratio to the immediate importance. Yet who shall measure the extent of that importance? "Revolutions in opinion," wrote Southey during the post-Waterloo ferment of ideas in England, "bring about the fate of empires"; and certainly Morelly and Mably were among the score or so most important men of the eighteenth century who brought about such a revolution in opinion. What a modern economist has said in another connexion is no less true of the writings of these two men.

> The whole aims and objects of economic policy and legislation, the trend of all movements for social reform, revolutionary or progressive, must depend upon the *prevailing sense of ideal right*, upon the notions of justice and fairness, more or less coherent, which recommend themselves to the governing body of opinion at any time as axiomatic and unquestionable. Vague and intangible, perverse and impracticable as they may seem, these notions of right are none the less real and resistless in their sway. . . . In progressive societies they are a living and, in the long run, a dominant force. Their growth is slow and secular; revolutions and counter-revolutions may run their course, while they remain but slightly changed; but as they gradually develop they fuse and transform the whole structure of positive law, and alter the face of civil society.[1]

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